

FAMOUS
MORGANATIC MARRIAGES

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INTRODUCTION

THE Great War has changed everything except human nature, and if the term "morganatic marriage" now seems anachronistic there always will be men and women to rebel against convention and to seek in experiment a panacea for restlessness and *ennui*. Mankind has ever been inconsistent. It has set up kings, pampered their families and pauperised their brains, applauded them when they have contracted "love matches"—going into ecstasies over their "human qualities" because a prince has married a peasant or a princess has condescended to ally herself with a "mere nobleman"—and then has dethroned them for not being divine! We may live to see the day when an English or American millionaire creates astonishment by permitting his daughter to marry a Windsor or a Romanoff, though in that case there will be many who will not long for old age because they shrink from the horrors of a bogus and spurious equality.

A morganatic marriage is generally regarded as a love match, but an examination of the records does not prove them to be more successful than less romantic alliances entered into for reasons of State. There could have been no more captivating story than that of the events which brought about the union between H.R.H. Princess Eliza-

both of Austria and Otto von Windischgraetz, and yet the marriage has been a complete failure. If democratic Austria can find time to establish a democratic divorce court its first *cause célèbre* will be Prince Otto von Windischgraetz v. Princess Otto von Windischgraetz and Many Others. There are charges and counter-charges on both sides, and altogether the affair indicates that the Hapsburgs are as unlucky as they are incompetent.

It has been rumoured that King Alexander wishes to marry an American beauty and make her his queen. He has for precedent Napoleon III who persuaded his volatile subjects to accept a lady of non-royal birth as their empress. It is doubtful, however, if he will succeed, for the over-taxed Greeks may not regard an American queen as the real article, and ultra-democrats like, above all things, to get value for other people's money.

Princess Patricia of Connaught has two personalities. In the royal circle she is a princess of the United Kingdom; outside it she ranks as the daughter of a duke and is Lady Patricia Ramsay. The German-made word "morganatic" has only been whispered in connection with her marriage, but as it is most improbable that she ever will come near the succession to the throne it is unnecessary to define it.

If it may be urged that I have treated too romantically the twenty morganatic marriages I have chosen for this volume, but my excuse is that even a royal romance may have its romantic side.

CHARLES KINGSTON.

FAMOUS MORGANATIC MARRIAGES

CHAPTER I

A RUSSIAN ADVENTRESS

A GREAT fancy-dress ball was in progress at one of the greatest mansions in Petrograd. Princes and princesses, relatives and friends of the czar, famous noblemen and women, were amongst the throng, and every fashionable beauty in Russian society was there, determined to win as much admiration as she could for herself. It was a night of nights, and a function long to be remembered in the annals of the capital.

Suddenly a young girl—she was barely sixteen—entered the ballroom wearing the dress of a southern peasant. It was her first appearance in society, and only a few of the revellers knew who she was; but from the moment they saw her all the men and most of the women had eyes for no one else. “Who is she?” “Where does she come from?” “Can I obtain an introduction?” They asked these questions, entranced by the beauty of the new-comer, and soon it was whispered that she was the daughter of Count Hutton Czapski, a nobleman

who had been compelled to live in retirement for some years owing to the loss of the greater part of his fortune; and that was the reason why his daughter was practically a stranger to Petrograd society.

She was certainly surpassingly beautiful, possessing a lissome figure, dark, flashing, mischievous eyes, cherry lips, and a complexion that looked like a permanent blush. Before the ball was over she had a score of men at her feet, and within a few hours was a recognised queen of beauty in a city of beautiful women.

The next day half a dozen admirers called at her father's house, and she was very gracious to them until a Grand Duke put in an appearance. He was a silly young man, with a weakness for making a fool of himself, and Count Czapski, afraid lest he should offend the czar, implored her not to encourage the prince and to confine her friendships to those in her own station in life. Sonya—this was a pet name her father had given her—protested with a pout, but when matters were approaching a crisis the count took the affair into his own hands. With an intolerance which aped czarism he sent for a young friend of his, Alexander Kolemne, who held an obscure position in the Russian Legation at Berne, and ordered his daughter to marry him. Sonya cried at first, but her father was adamant, and in the end she gave way. The ceremony was performed as secretly as possible, and Sonya Czapski became Madame Kolemne.

Her husband's happiness did not last long, however.

He had romantically and conveniently fallen in love at first sight with the fascinating little beauty, and when she was his wife he was the proudest man in the world, but within twenty-four hours he was astonished and dismayed to receive challenges from three noblemen, each of whom declared that Madame Kolemene had sworn to marry him. There was no help for it ; and Kolemene had to fight them all.

To the amazement of everybody he emerged unscathed from the encounters, and these exciting experiences were followed by a brief period of dullness at Berne. Kolemene hoped that his wife would settle down and forget the follies of her past. He was good to her, and he did all in his power to gratify her passion for jewels, but soon she began obtaining costly gems and expensive furs on credit, and Kolemene found himself faced by ruin. To add to his difficulties a cousin of the czar met him one day in the streets of Berne and struck him across the face. Kolemene had never met the Grand Duke before, and he was in complete ignorance of his assailant's motive, but it turned out that the young prince had nearly ruined himself dancing attendance on madame, who, when he confessed that he had no more money to spend, had coolly dismissed him. The Grand Duke, firmly convinced that Kolemene had been in the plot with his wife, took this method of forcing a duel.

On the morning that it was to take place Madame Kolemene went to Paris by the first train. It did not matter to her whether her

husband was killed or not. All she wanted was a few days' gaiety in the French capital. By now whatever heart the beauty may have been born with was turned to stone. She lived only for herself, and she hated and despised her husband because he was not rich enough for her.

In Paris she heard that the Grand Duke had seriously injured her husband, but in return had received half a dozen wounds. She only laughed and proceeded to dress for a visit to the opera. In vain her maid pointed out that her husband might be dying, and counselled her to go back to Berne. Madame would not hear of it. She would not have been sorry had he died, for she wished to be free with the freedom of the woman who is a slave to her passions.

Kolemine, however, recovered, and madame had to return to his side. Critical days were ahead of them now, for the czar, incensed beyond measure by the duel, had resolved to dismiss Kolemine from the diplomatic service and exile him for ever from Russia. The young man was heartbroken, but he did not reproach the cause of all his troubles. As for madame she was perfectly indifferent, but, unconsciously, she was destined to save her husband from disgrace. One of her old admirers, a near relation of the czar's, hearing of Kolemine's desperate position, appealed in person to him to be lenient, and His Majesty, who was easily appeased, cancelled his first order, and merely transferred Kolemine from Berne to Darmstadt, little realising that his clemency was going to cause a

convulsion in royal circles, and affect himself and his family in a way that no one could have foreseen. But it was a different Madame Kolemne who arrived at Darmstadt. She had turned over a new leaf, she said, and her sudden reformation seemed to be genuine. She accepted no invitations unless her husband accompanied her, and instead of passing the days in reckless pleasure she took to visiting hospitals and charitable institutions, and, in short, became a charming woman, all heart and good nature. Kolemne was entranced. His humble house had now become a meeting-place for the best people in the capital of the Grand Duchy of Hesse. Everybody wanted to know Madame Kolemne. She was the most popular hostess in the city. Of course, male admirers flocked around her, and some even ventured to send her costly presents, but these were promptly returned unopened. Madame had reformed with a vengeance, and Alexander Kolemne blessed the day he had made her his wife.

For some months this state of affairs existed. No gossip or scandal was associated with the name of Kolemne now, and madame's cleverness and popularity seemed to assure a splendid future for them both when most unexpectedly the whole position of affairs was altered.

Madame Kolemne, tired of a long series of receptions and dances, dressed herself one January morning for a solitary walk in the country lanes surrounding Darmstadt, and she started off, intending to pass some hours by herself in the country. Her husband was busy

with dispatches from Russia, and, having kissed her good-bye, returned to his office.

It was a bright, clear morning, and the sun shone with unusual brilliance for the time of year when Madame Kolemene, looking fascinating in her furs, left her house. She was a good walker, and she was soon enjoying the solitude of the fields beyond the city. Suddenly, however, she was addressed by a tall, bearded man, whose dark eyes were gloominess personified, and whose heavy mouth indicated a morose and taciturn disposition. Madame recognised him instantly, and made her curtsy to Louis IV, reigning Grand Duke of Hesse.

To her surprise the Grand Duke entered into conversation with her, and she, exhilarated by her walk, talked in a charming, fascinatingly unconventional manner until they were both surprised to discover that they had been together two hours.

"You must come and see me at the palace," said the Grand Duke before they parted. "I am a lonely old man, and I should be honoured if you will favour me with your company for a few hours now and then."

Madame promised graciously, and the Grand Duke returned home. She was flattered and fluttered by his attentions, for she, a practised and skilful flirt, had seen in the prince's eyes something which told her that he had been attracted by her and would never forget her.

Louis IV was neither rich nor important so far as his own person was concerned, but by reason of his relationship to practically every

crowned head in Europe he had to be taken seriously. His dominions were small, and he was, of course, merely a puppet in the hands of the German Emperor, but he had married Princess Alice, Queen Victoria's daughter, and the Queen was making him an allowance which, enabled him to maintain greater state than would have been possible on the beggarly contribution he received annually from his subjects. He had lost his wife a few years before meeting Madame Kolemene, but because she had loved her daughter dearly Queen Victoria took a special interest in the Grand Duke, and had generously intimated that she would do all she could for his five motherless children.

The Grand Duke had been greatly affected by the death of his wife, and for years his palace had been shorn of all gaiety. He was a gloomy man given to depression, and he took only a faint interest in the affairs of his country. But once he had made the acquaintance of Madame Kolemene he changed completely. The palace was put in the hands of the repairers and decorators, and when ready it became the centre of social festivities in Darmstadt. Dinners, balls, receptions, and theatrical performances became the order of the day and night, and all for the sake of the wife of the young Russian. Louis IV was, in fact, in love with Madame Kolemene.

It was her greatest triumph, and the prospect of sharing a Grand Ducal throne roused all the ambition of which the beauty was capable. She saw herself reigning over a not inconsider-

able portion of the German Empire, and she resolved that so far as she was concerned the scandalmongers would not be able to link her name with the Grand Duke's unless it was as his wife.

Louis IV made no attempt to conceal his passion for the beautiful Russian. It mattered not to him that his advisers pointed out the risks he was running. They reminded him of the only person he feared—Queen Victoria, the resolute little woman who ruled all her relations with a rod of iron. Louis went pale at the thought of what the Queen might do if she heard, but he recovered his composure instantly, and went to see madame again.

He was disappointed and exasperated at her coldness. "I like you, Louis," she would tell him with a provoking laugh, followed by a sigh that might have meant anything, "but I'm a respectable married woman, and it is best we should not see one another too often. Good-bye. Perhaps in the future we may meet again."

This sort of thing nearly drove the widower crazy. He wanted her more than ever, and at last he had his way. The first step was her divorce from Alexander Kolemene. That was arranged easily enough, and as a reward Louis, with extraordinary cunning, induced the then Czar of Russia to appoint the complacent Kolemene Consul-General of Japan. Japan was as far away from Darmstadt as one could desire, and all concerned were contented.

The day came when Madame Kolemene moved from the Russian Legation to a small and

luxuriously furnished house standing in its own grounds. She was now living in a very retired fashion, and only Louis and a few others ever saw her. But she was merely waiting, for she was well aware that the time was rapidly approaching when the Grand Duke of Hesse would ask her to marry him.

She left nothing to chance. Before Louis asked her to choose the date on which they were to be married she found two priests who were willing to perform the ceremony in her drawing-room. The priests were, of course, well paid by her, and she guaranteed that she would take every precaution to prevent the news of their participation in the ceremony becoming known, for Louis had influential relatives who could inflict severe punishment upon aiders and abettors in his great act of folly.

Now the Grand Duke of Hesse was a very weak-minded person, and although, when not in madame's society, he would swear that he did not want to marry her, the moment he came within range of her bright eyes he was as clay in her hands. She could talk him over in a couple of minutes, and so, after days spent in indecision, and realising that he would be miserable without her, he declared at last that she must name the day which was to be honoured by their wedding. Madame, who had been anticipating this for weeks, promptly decided on April 30. He started in amazement when he heard her decision.

"Impossible, impossible!" he cried, rising in great agitation. "Why, my dear, you've

selected the very day Queen Victoria has settled upon for the marriage of my eldest daughter, Princess Victoria, to Prince Louis of Battenberg. I daren't marry you that day. The queen is coming and the Prince and Princess of Wales, and the Crown Prince and Princess of Germany will be my guests, too. Darmstadt will be packed with my relatives. Oh, it's quite impossible, I assure you."

Madame Kolemene went very pale. She was startled by the coincidence, but she knew that if she changed her plans the priests might get nervous and refuse their aid. She determined, therefore, to stand or fall by April 30.

"Very well, Louis," she said coldly, "please yourself. But don't forget this—at half-past four on the afternoon of April 30 I will be waiting for you before the altar with the priests ready to marry us. I will wait for half an hour. If you do not appear I shall leave Darmstadt for ever."

He burst into tears, and implored her to be generous. She turned from him in disdain, and left the room, and Louis, distracted and at his wits' end, went back to the palace to begin the preparations for the reception of his august relatives.

Within a few days Darmstadt was filled with a glittering throng. Queen Victoria came with a large suite. The Prince and Princess of Wales—afterwards King Edward and Queen Alexandra—also took up their quarters in the Royal Palace. The Crown Prince and Princess of Germany—later the Emperor and Empress Frederick—

headed a crowd of German royalties. There was, of course, a strong force of Battenbergs, and over all Queen Victoria towered by sheer force of personality.

The morning of April 30, 1884, came—the day that Queen Victoria and Madame Kolemene had each decided upon an important wedding, unknown to one another. Amid a scene of splendour Princess Victoria, the daughter of the man who was going to contract a morganatic marriage that very afternoon, became the wife of Prince Louis of Battenberg. The Grand Duke, of course, gave her away, thinking all the time of his own marriage, and wondering what his relatives would say when they heard of it. He greatly feared Queen Victoria, and he must have been madly in love with Madame Kolemene to have thought of marrying her whilst the great Queen was a guest in his palace.

Prince and Princess Louis of Battenberg had taken their departure from Darmstadt, and the numerous royalties who were the guests of the reigning Grand Duke had retired to their private apartments, when their host quickly slipped out of the palace, crossed the grounds that divided him from his charmer, and entered the improvised chapel in her house in time to keep the appointment. Madame was delighted. She had passed days and nights in mingled terror and grief, haunted by a fear that her lover would fail her at the last moment. When he arrived he found her in her bridal garments with two heavily cloaked black figures beside her. These were the priests, each of whom had accepted

from madame a fee of two hundred and fifty pounds.

And then the second important marriage in Darmstadt that day took place. It was in direct contrast to the ceremony of a few hours before, but yet not less significant even if there were no princes to applaud the union of the corpulent Grand Duke and the pretty woman who thirsted for power. Immediately their task was finished the priests left Darmstadt for the South of France, but one of them took away a certificate of the marriage, having first handed a copy each to bride and bridegroom. This was one of madame's precautions in case the legality of the ceremony should ever be challenged.

Now it happened that about the time the duke and the Russian beauty were being made man and wife Queen Victoria remembered that she had something important to say to her host. She, therefore, sent the Prince of Wales to bring him to her apartments. The prince made a tour of the palace and of the grounds, but failed to discover the whereabouts of Louis, and he reported to his mother that doubtless her son-in-law had been called away by one of his ministers, and would presently return. In the midst of this talk the Crown Prince Frederick entered the room and he promptly volunteered to find the duke, for he knew the Darmstadt Palace better than this brother-in-law, the Prince of Wales.

It was only by accident, however, that Frederick succeeded in his quest. He was strolling through the gardens when he overheard a gardener couple the Grand Duke's name with

that of Madame Kolemene. Instantly the Crown Prince revealed himself to the astonished servant, and the latter, imagining that His Imperial Highness had heard everything, blurted out the astounding information that Louis was at Madame Kolemene's house, and that two priests had been seen to precede him there.

A prey to forebodings, Prince Frederick instantly went to the little house on the borders of the royal estate where a servant in the employ of Louis tried to prevent him entering, but Frederick brushed the fellow aside and strode into the house. A few moments later the Grand Duke came downstairs, and in faltering tones admitted that he had married the beauty who owned the house.

The Crown Prince of Germany was astounded. He knew that Louis had always been weak-minded, but that he should take as his wife a woman of madame's reputation was scarcely believable. The duke had four other children besides Princess Louis of Battenberg, and the thought that Madame Kolemene was now their stepmother exasperated him to such an extent that he could hardly keep his hands off the trembling bridegroom.

Controlling himself with an effort, the Crown Prince informed him that Queen Victoria wished to see him at once; but Louis, irritated by Frederick's blunt criticisms, point-blank refused to return to the palace, and eventually the Crown Prince had to go back alone and seek out the Prince of Wales. The latter's amazement was as great as his brother-in-law's had been,

but he was against acquainting Queen Victoria with the scandal of the Grand Duke's marriage. Frederick, however, pointed out that the queen was the only person in Europe whom Louis really feared. "She must be told, for she alone can save us all from this terrible disgrace," he said, in conclusion.

Louis had declined to obey the Crown Prince of Germany, but when Queen Victoria ordered him to come to her he realised that the game was up. He regretfully left his bride of a few hours, and as the clocks were chiming midnight he walked into the palace, and, like a whipped schoolboy, made his way into the great queen's presence.

The scene that ensued was a most unhappy one for the bridegroom. Queen Victoria knew her own value and importance, and she had a vigorous command of cutting language. In the plainest of terms she soundly rated the Grand Duke, and ordered him never to see Madame Kolemene again. He protested in whimpers that he could not be separated from his wife. The queen answered that if he did not there and then solemnly promise to expel Madame Kolemene out of his life and his dominions she would depart from Darmstadt that same night and place the House of Hesse outside the pale. The Prince of Wales and the Crown Prince Frederick stood beside the Queen, and agreed with every word she said, and Louis could not defy the three most powerful personages in Europe, and German-like, bursting into tears, he gave the required promise.

Before daybreak Madame Kolemene knew her fate. Hearing the crunch of feet on the gravel outside her house she descended to open the door herself, expecting to find her husband. Instead she saw six members of the Darmstadt secret police who informed her that she must leave the country at once. When she protested they drove her back to her room with the blunt intimation that she had only half an hour in which to make preparations for her long journey. The clever beauty understood and obeyed, and the dawn was stealing over the earth when she was on her way to exile.

Queen Victoria, the invincible, had triumphed again.

But if it was easy to expel madame from Hessian territory it was quite another matter to get the marriage annulled. When the subject was broached she wrote passionate letters to her husband, declaring in unmistakable terms her opposition to divorce or annulment. She was his legal wife, and she reminded him that there were three certificates in existence to prove the fact; finally, she threatened to appeal to the world if any attempt was made to annul her marriage. Louis consulted the chief ecclesiastics in his dominions, and was informed that they were powerless. The Church had united them, and could not untie the knot.

It was the Crown Prince Frederick of Germany who came to the rescue of the Grand Duke. He had taken the morganatic marriage to heart much more than any of his numerous relatives, Queen Victoria excepted, and he could not rest

until the adventuress was deprived of the right to call the duke her husband. When lawyers and Churchmen failed he turned to his own resources, and in a happy moment he discovered an old German statute which forbade the marriage of an officer of the German Army without the permission of his Commander-in-Chief. Now Frederick held the latter position, while Louis IV, reigning Grand Duke of Hesse, was a general under him.

Having selected two trusty lawyers, Frederick dispatched them to interview Madame Kolemene. At first she pooh-poohed the suggestion that an army law could make her marriage null and void, but the lawyers worked upon her feelings, and eventually succeeded in making madame admit that, after all, half a loaf is better than no bread. "Decline to be reasonable, madame, and you get nothing," they said suavely. "Be guided by us and you will receive a handsome allowance guaranteed by the Crown Prince of Germany, along with the title of countess. It is for you to choose, but if you are wise——" an eloquent shrug of the shoulders completed the sentence.

Madame asked for three hours to think matters over, and the wily lawyers instantly agreed, knowing that they had gained their objective. The woman's mind was, of course, already made up, and her request for time for consideration of their offer was only pretence. When she saw the prince's emissaries again she announced her decision. She would sign the necessary papers agreeing to the dissolution of her marriage if the

Imperial House of Germany settled an annuity of forty thousand marks (two thousand pounds) on her and gave her a title of nobility.

The terms were accepted, and Madame Kolemne became Countess of Romrod, and as she had never loved Louis it was easy for her to forget her disappointment. She was, at any rate, secure for life, and she had reached a height to which Alexander Kolemne could never have raised her.

She never met Louis again, although when she gave birth to a son of which he was the father he made an ineffectual attempt to see the child. Madame, however, discouraged him, and Louis' relatives did the rest. His younger daughters were growing up, and in the course of time one of them married the Czar of Russia, and when a career had to be found for madame's child it was the good-natured czarina who took her stepbrother under her care, and obtained for him a commission in a crack Russian regiment. He became a popular officer, and never presumed on his relationship to the czar's wife, and when the war started he was one of the first to meet the foe in the field.

But to return to madame. She lived in retirement after her expulsion from Darmstadt, and faithfully kept her promise not to molest the man whose wife she had been for six weeks. Her's was the shortest morganatic marriage on record, and from first to last she was with her husband only five hours. The greater part of the six weeks during which she was the wife of Louis IV she spent alone, waiting for the result

of the attempts to break the union between herself and the man who had given Queen Victoria such a fright, and who had kept the heirs to two great thrones up all night in a fruitless endeavour to prevent a scandal of the first magnitude reaching the ears of the world beyond the palace walls.

CHAPTER II

KING LEOPOLD AND CAROLINE LACROIX

NEARLY twenty years ago King Leopold II of Belgium was passing down a mean Paris street when his eyes alighted upon the merry face of a young woman who was obviously trying to imitate the lady of fashion. The old king—he was then sixty-five—was much amused by the cheap finery and the absurd airs the girl gave herself. Nevertheless, her black eyes held him. He had just come from the Riviera, where the spoilt beauties of several countries had flattered and coaxed him, and this young girl appealed to him as something fresh and inviting, despite her attempts at artificiality.

It was just like Leopold to stop and speak to her, for he was then the most unconventional monarch in Europe. He loved to roam about Paris in dusty and musty attire, although he knew that his tall figure and hawk-like features identified him everywhere. The girl recognised him, and as if already conscious of the extraordinary sequel that this meeting was to have, she told him all that she wished him to believe about herself, carefully suppressing everything that tended to place her at a disadvantage.

She said that her name was Caroline Lacroix,

and that she was an actress. She spoke glibly of her acquaintance with famous theatrical people, poets, and painters. Leopold was not deceived, but he liked her chatter, and when at last they had to part Caroline had agreed to call and see him at the second-rate hotel at which the millionaire king was then staying.

Of course Caroline was highly delighted with herself. She felt that she had gained a real live king for a friend, and that was something for a daughter of a foreman railway porter. She had been born at Buda-Pesth, when her father was working there, but, of course, she was French. Now she laughed as she remembered that during the time she had been chatting confidentially with the King of the Belgians not more than half a mile away one of her sisters was selling vegetables from a barrow in the market-place.

Caroline had all her life been ambitious, greatly to the distress of her parents, who had reared seven out of their thirteen children, all of whom were doing well, with the exception of this one rebellious daughter. Had not her mother found her situations in a laundry, a shop, and in a factory, and had not Caroline deliberately thrown away her chances by being cheeky to her superiors? It was, indeed, heart-breaking, and the respectable old mother shook her head sadly when she contemplated the fate that was likely to overtake Caroline if she persisted in her course of conduct.

Twice that week, however, Caroline lunched with King Leopold, and before a fortnight she

had decided to throw in her lot with his. She had been told that the monarch was meanness personified, and it took her about forty-eight hours to discover that she had not been misinformed, but the black-eyed beauty with the charming voice and the uncanny knowledge of mankind—where she got it from nobody knows—smiled to herself. She was glad that Leopold was mean to everybody; she meant to be the only exception.

When the summer of 1901 came round Caroline Lacroix, the daughter of the French railway porter, was living in a magnificent château near Juvisy, and surrounded by every luxury money could buy. Leopold was really in love with her, and Caroline presided over the lordly mansion as if she had been born to it. Her manners were correct and charming, and her voice pleasing and seductive.

Many who came to criticise remained to solicit her*friendship. It was very wonderful, for she had received little or no schooling, preferring, perhaps, to graduate in the greatest of all schools, the world.

There were those, however, who smiled at the king's infatuation. Leopold was notorious in seven cities for his fickleness, and interested friends advised Caroline to extract all she could out of him so as to provide for the time when he would roughly send her away. She smiled, and did not change her policy, and, although she never tried any coquetry with her lover, he was constantly at her side. Of course, his kingly duties compelled him to be often in Brussels, but

at the first opportunity he returned to the château.

In 1906 Caroline's first son was born. Two years previously Leopold had created her Baroness Vaughan, and he was so pleased with the boy that he made him Count de Tervuren. Caroline's luck was in when he told her that he was exactly like that son of his who had died in 1869 at the age of ten. Leopold had never forgotten the death of the Duke of Brabant, and because of the likeness he lavished his affections upon the boy. In 1908 another son was born, and he was given the title of Count de Revenstein.

But coming to the conclusion that the Baroness Vaughan must have a better home for his two sons Leopold purchased for her a veritable earthly paradise in France, the Château de Balincourt, and hither the family removed. Caroline revelled in the place, and, to tell the truth, she could do the honours with the charm of a duchess.

"You call Leopold mean," she said to a famous French lady who paid her a visit on a certain New Year's Day. "Well, he gave me forty thousand pounds on my last birthday, and this morning his present was fifty thousand pounds. So you mustn't be surprised if I regard him as the most generous man in the world."

"The visitor sniffed and changed the conversation, and presently Caroline went off to see her children. What would old Madame Lacroix, the wife of the railway porter, have said if she had seen her scapegrace daughter bending over the cots of her two sons, both counts in their

own right, whilst three nurses stood respectfully by, and a footman was at the door ready to open it for his mistress? The wages of sin are not always death. But Madame Lacroix never saw her daughter's splendour, for the baroness kept her family at a distance.

Perhaps her only trouble in those happy, all-too-quickly-fleeting years was Leopold's unwillingness to spend money on himself. For eight years he went about in a shabby straw hat, and just when it threatened to fall to pieces Caroline surreptitiously appropriated it, burned it, and bought a new one for the man who had given her two hundred thousand pounds within the space of a twelvemonth. But when Leopold saw the new hat he went into a fury, accusing her of throwing away money, and declaring that they would both be ruined if she persisted in her extravagance. It was only when Caroline told him that she had picked it up for a quarter of its value at a second-hand clothes' shop that he was appeased.

On another occasion she was puzzled by his sudden dismissal of a man who had been his favourite valet. She asked for an explanation. "Do you know what the fellow has done?" he declared in a voice that vibrated with anger. "Why, he actually changed my towel before the week was up! He knows I use one towel a week, and because he thought it was dirty, he changed it. Does he think I'm made of money!"

He would not wear gloves, and he hated tobacco, and he was in the habit of behaving boorishly at table. His conduct became so bad

that the baroness, who had once washed linen for ten shillings a week, took him in hand and tried to teach him manners. When she confessed sorrowfully that she had failed he laughingly consoled her with the words, "After all, my dear, you can't deny this animal has breed!" He was right about the breed, for Leopold had the bluest of blue blood in his veins.

It was tantalising, however, to the ambitious woman to see this king acting like a gutter loafer. She had dreams of the Belgian crown, and she was certain that she would be able to act the part successfully. She wanted the world to take her seriously, but Leopold's extraordinary behaviour while it disillusioned her as to the "divine attributes of kings" angered her because it reacted on her ambitions.

What could she do with a man, the possessor of a private fortune of five million pounds, who, when he found a gold watch in a Paris street, insisted upon claiming the reward of a hundred francs which its owner had advertised he was willing to pay if his property was restored to him? Leopold went to the address and personally received the money, and it was not until years afterwards that the prosperous Parisian dealer in uncut diamonds became aware of the identity of the tall, odd-looking and shabbily dressed gentleman who had waited on the doormat whilst the servant brought him the money.

Yet he had his human side, and when Roger Casement and others were denouncing him for the atrocities that were taking place in his property in Africa known as the Belgian Congo,

he would enter a shop, fill his pockets with sweets and toys, and walk to the Château de Balincourt. A few minutes later he would be in the *salon* chatting with Caroline when the door would open and two little boys would burst in, hailing their father as "Santa Claus," because his long white beard made him look like the twin brother of that famous Christmas character. The contents of his capacious pockets heightened the illusion and amid his family Leopold lost his meanness, his cynical contempt for men and women, and became a human being.

It is difficult to conjure up the picture because at the time the world was ringing with denunciations of him. The Belgian Parliament was declaring with one voice that the stigma must be removed from their country. The Congo belonged to Leopold, and was his private property. Nevertheless, it was admitted that it was a disgrace to Belgium that its king should be coining millions of money out of his tortured slaves.

One reason why he adored Caroline was her tact. She never referred to the Congo or anything else likely to upset him. She was just the charming, happy, contented housewife, always with a smile for her husband, and ever a devoted mother. It would have astonished Leopold's enemies could they have seen him, seventy-four years of age, playing pick-a-back with his three-year-old son. Yet this was the man who purposely went to London in order to avoid his wife's deathbed. He left his queen to die in the

knowledge that he hated her, and was only anxious to hear of her demise. This was the monarch who ordered his servants to turn his daughters out of the palace at Brussels, and who eventually hounded them out of Belgium because they had been upset by their mother's death.

Leopold's hatred of his wife and daughters is one of the greatest puzzles in human psychology. They tried to please him, but somehow the very sight of them sent him raving, and for the sake of peace they had to keep as far away as possible from him. But the loathing remained, and when in 1908 an eminent specialist warned him that he had not long to live he began to make his plans to prevent his large private fortune going to his daughters.

The king had inherited from his father six hundred thousand pounds, and he knew that by the law of the land this sum must be divided at his decease amongst the three princesses, but he had on his own account by sheer commercial genius built up a fortune of five million pounds, which he resolved should be Caroline's; and how to do this legally and in the most binding way was a problem over which he burned much midnight oil.

He solved it in the end very simply. Caroline should become his wife. When he told her so she nearly fainted with pleasure. She was going to be a king's bride! I hope she recalled her mother's angry prophecy when the girl announced her dismissal from the laundry—"You will come to a bad end, Caroline. Of that I am certain."

The "end" was to see her the wife of a king, who was a multi-millionaire. Leopold, now in his seventy-fourth year, entered into the preparations for the wedding with all the zest and excitement of a boy planning a trick on his master. He resolved that his marriage should be a secret until he chose to spring it as an unpleasant surprise upon his daughters. His suite at Brussels and his Ministers of State remembered afterwards how often they had heard Leopold chuckle to himself during this period. Of course, they did not know the reason then.

An obscure and little known monastery in San Remo was the scene of the memorable ceremony. One afternoon a motor-car drove up, and a tall, white-bearded gentleman got out, with a happy-looking lady, who was exquisitely dressed. They brought with them a friend they could trust, and who witnessed the marriage. There was, however, no attempt at concealment inside the monastery, and the officiating priests were well aware that the bride was Caroline Lacroix, Baroness Vaughan, and the bridegroom, His Majesty King Leopold of the Belgians.

When they were legally husband and wife all the documents connected with the marriage were placed in an envelope, sealed, and that evening a special courier started for Rome to deliver them to the Pope. It is a rule that when a morganatic marriage takes place, according to the rites of the Roman Catholic Church, the papers relating to it are dispatched to His Holiness. In this particular case the rule was to have a very important sequel.

They had not been man and wife three days when Leopold made a fresh will. This bequeathed all the money he had accumulated by his own exertions to Baroness Vaughan, and to show his complete trust in her, he left to her discretion the question of settling fortunes on each of their children. He knew how she was devoted to them, and that their interest would be hers.

For a little over a year Caroline was the wife of the king. The marriage, of course, gave her a new status. She was now frequently seen in his residence at Laeken, near Brussels, and when the last illness came she took command and was the best of the nurses who waited on the royal patient. No one denied her the right to watch over Leopold's deathbed. The servants obeyed her implicitly, for there was something in the king's attitude towards the Baroness Vaughan that proclaimed the fact that she was something better than a mere fancy of the dissolute old monarch's.

Leopold did not want to die. For more than half a century he had lived entirely for himself, and in his own class he had no friends. It was said that the late King Edward on one occasion shook hands with Leopold in the foyer of a French theatre because, as he afterwards explained, "The King of the Belgians looked so lonely and unpopular that he considered it an act of charity to show this little kindness to him." Nevertheless, it was Britain's great king who wrote privately to Leopold to remonstrate for his open disregard of the conventions on the

Riviera and elsewhere, warning him that he was bringing the race of kings into contempt. Had not Belgium been such a democratic country and conscious that it had its ruler well in hand there is every reason to believe that there would have been a revolution and Leopold would have become a king in exile. He was, however, spared that humiliation.

During his last illness he spoke only of hismorganatic wife and his two little boys. He declared that he was at peace because he had provided for them all and in such a manner that his enemies would not be able to deprive them of the immense fortune to which they would succeed at his death.

To the end he hated his daughters, and it was with difficulty that on his deathbed he was restrained from working himself up into paroxysms of fury against them. Caroline wisely turned his thoughts away from them, and as she sat by his bedside night after night her pleasant tact eased his pain.

At midnight on December 16, 1909, he became worse, and the doctors were summoned from their apartments, and for more than two hours they tried to enable him to breathe without pain. Suddenly Leopold spread out his arms and cried, "I'm choking, doctor; I'm choking," and a moment later was dead.

The baroness closed his eyes, and she prepared him for his coffin, but although he had asked for a simple burial the State would not permit it. Leopold could not be buried like an ordinary citizen. He represented the country,

and must be interred with befitting honours, and so a deputation of notables arrived, the body was removed to Brussels, and Caroline Lacroix never saw her husband's remains again.

Meanwhile the news of his death had aroused many emotions amongst his daughters. The eldest, Princess Louise, took the first step. She was not aware that the Baroness Vaughan had married her father, and she regarded her as a vulgar interloper, a woman with whom no respectable person would associate.

Acting as her father's eldest child, she gave orders that the baroness was to be turned out of Laeken at once, and the house and contents sealed up. Her Brussels lawyer hastened to obey her commands, but his amazement was great when the baroness calmly informed him that she was the widow of the late king, and that she had every right to be there.

Her statement was received with contemptuous disbelief, and the lawyer's assistants were about to use force when the Pope's representative in Belgium unexpectedly arrived to say that he had just had a telegram from His Holiness informing him that the baroness and the king had been properly and legally married, and that he, the Nuncio, was, in the Pope's name, to afford her every protection.

The intervention of the Papal Nuncio altered the situation at once, and Caroline's victory was assured. However, she was not in the mood to cause any scandal with her husband lying unburied, and at the first opportunity she retired with her children to the Château de

Balincourt. There she awaited the hostilities that were bound to arise when the king's will was read.

It was known that Leopold had died a multi-millionaire, and his three daughters fully expected to inherit a couple of millions each. Great, therefore, was their astonishment and anger when they were informed that they were not to have more than a tenth of that sum apiece. All three flew to their lawyers. Princess Louise herself wrote to all the banks in Brussels and Paris warning them not to pay over any money deposited in the name of King Leopold or the Baroness Vaughan. The latter, of course, also had a first-class firm of lawyers to help her, and being wilful, determined, intelligent and clever, not to mention extraordinarily shrewd, it must be admitted that the balance of brains was on her side.

A few days after the State funeral it became generally known that Leopold had left the baroness five million pounds. The amount took people's breath away, and the unfortunate princesses, who considered themselves disinherited, implored Belgium deputies to raise the question in Parliament. They refused to believe that the King had married Caroline, but it was, of course, easy to prove that they were mistaken.

Writs were issued on either side, and the first victory went to the baroness when a Paris tribunal ordered the seals to be removed from the Château de Balincourt. The fact was that the princesses were "bluffing." They were devout Roman Catholics themselves, and they

were perfectly well aware that in the eyes of their Church Caroline Lacroix was their father's legal widow, while her two sons were legitimate. But if they imagined that they were going to frighten the redoubtable baroness they were grievously disappointed. She was not afraid of anybody, and she stood up for her rights until the enemy retreated.

Caroline Lacroix is now a middle-aged woman, generous to everybody except her own relatives, and devoted to her children. It must be recorded in her favour that during the War she used some of her fortune in helping to make the lot of the wounded more endurable. But I doubt if the world has heard the last of the extraordinary woman and she may yet play a leading part in the new Belgium created by the victory of the Allies.

CHAPTER III

THE ARCHDUKE AND THE BALLET GIRL

WHEN the Crown Prince Rudolph of Austria died by his own hand at Meyerling he ended once and for all the most serious attempt to seize the Crown of Hungary during the protracted lifetime of the Emperor Francis Joseph of Austria. Rudolph had been ruined by his father's training. The old dotard who sat on the throne of Austria made his son the man he proved to be, and the prince died as the result of reckless fondness for intrigue characteristic of the Hapsburgs.

Now, amongst the Crown Prince's relatives there was an archduke of the name of John Salvator. He was a sort of second cousin of the heir to the throne, and as John Salvator was a man of original ideas, with a warm place in his heart for the common people, he had always been in the bad books of the emperor, who was, of course, the head of his house. John Salvator was, therefore, ready to fall in with Rudolph's plans when the latter proposed that they should set up a separate kingdom in Hungary, but, as I have stated, their activities were brought to an abrupt termination by the tragic death of the chief conspirator.

From that moment, however, the Archduke John knew that the feud between him and the emperor could never be ended. He had no intention of leaving Austria, where all his friends were, but he kept a wary eye on his own affairs, and realising that Francis Joseph was quite capable of conniving at his murder he never went out after dark in Vienna unattended.

From his youth upwards the Archduke John had been regarded by the emperor and the rest of the Imperial House of Austria as a dangerous and eccentric person. He had brains—an unpardonable offence in an archduke whose business, according to Hapsburg traditions, ought to have been drink and pleasure. John Salvator, however, preferred music and the other arts, and when he was sent into the army he committed the atrocious blunder—from the Austrian point of view—of being kind to the soldiers under him! It was the custom for Austrian private soldiers to be treated like dogs, and the non-commissioned officers had the power of life and death over them. The slightest infractions of discipline were punished with merciless severity. They were herded in filthy barracks, and tortured into becoming mere machines. The Archduke John, when he discovered this, wrote a pamphlet in which he proved that the Austrian system was stupid as well as criminal, and he practised what he preached, for he allowed no brutalities in his company. All this created a sensation, of course, and he was transferred to a distant garrison town. The Emperor Francis Joseph especially was furious. "He is a

lunatic ! ” he cried to his counsellors. “ Would there was a war somewhere so that I could send him into the first line.” If only he had known that a war was to destroy the Hapsburg dynasty !

The archduke had a friend amongst the ministers of State who reported this remark to him, adding a warning that his Imperial Highness should be careful of his personal safety. The Austrian Secret Service included men ready to commit the foulest crimes at the instigation of their superiors, and much practice had made them experts in the art of “ removing ” persons whom the emperor disliked. But the archduke merely laughed, and continued to do his best to ameliorate the lot of the unfortunate Austrian soldier, and his efforts only ended when one day the Crown Prince Rudolph came to him with the message from the emperor that he must resign his command and retire to the obscurity of private life. The archduke was not sorry. He was sick of the whole system, and he was only too pleased to be out of it all.

Once he had actually attempted to emancipate himself. He happened to be travelling from Port Said to Trieste when he made the acquaintance of a beautiful English girl on board ship. She fascinated him, and although only a few cabins separated them he wrote love letters to her. These letters, by the way, are still in existence. He asked her to marry him and emigrate to Australia, or if she did not care for life in the bush, he promised to settle down with her in England and earn his living as a professor of languages. It was a mad, rapturous courtship,

extending over a couple of days, but the girl wisely declined to be drawn into an entanglement, and after parting from John Salvator at Trieste she dropped completely out of his life. He returned to his regiment and to his rather lonely existence until the day when the Crown Prince Rudolph came post-haste from Vienna to inform him that he had incurred the emperor's displeasure.

The two men opened their hearts to one another that night. Rudolph was by now a bitterly disappointed man. His marriage had proved a failure. He hated his wife. He feared and distrusted his father. He was unhappy and distracted. Clearly there was madness dawning in a brain vitiated by evil living. There and then Rudolph and John Salvator plotted together to seize the throne of Hungary. The archduke was desperate enough to be willing to attempt anything, and with the zeal of the reformer he did not think of the risks.

When the Meyerling tragedy came the Archduke John retired to his Castle of Orth, a beautiful palace overlooking the Lake of Gmunden. He had plenty of money, and life ought not to have been without its compensations, but he was unhappy and restless. His existence seemed to him an idle and empty one, and he craved for something to relieve the monotony. He did not know that within a few days his whole life was to be changed. Love was coming to him unexpectedly, love that was to colour his life and give him happiness. It was what he had wanted all the time—the love of a good woman.

The archduke was particularly tired of his own society when he received an invitation from an old brother-officer to join him in some shooting at Semmering, a place easy of access either from Vienna or Trieste. The invitation was accepted, and the archduke started off, never dreaming that he was going to meet his fate.

The brother-officer who was his host knew his friend's liking for solitude, and he arranged that any afternoon when John Salvator went off by himself for a stroll he was to be left to his own devices. The prince on the first day of his arrival at Semmering discovered a sheltered lane leading away from the scattered houses into the heart of the country, and this he made his favourite walk during his stay.

It happened on the fourth afternoon that as he walked through the lane with his face averted he was surprised to hear a human voice. Looking up quickly he saw a girl of medium height with a pure oval face which at this moment was illumined by a smile of rare loveliness. She had not observed him, and neither had the elderly couple with whom she was conversing. The archduke watched her as if in a dream. Her voice was like a rippling melody—he was an artist and a musician and he knew. The tones enchanted him, and it was only when the girl and her parents had moved out of sight that he started out of the reverie into which he had fallen.

The shooting next day seemed to him a dreary and uninteresting affair. All the time the archduke was anxious to get away. He wished to

catch another glimpse of the beauty with the melodious voice. Who was she? What was she? How often he asked himself these questions, afraid to put them to any of his friends at the shooting-box for fear of exciting ribald laughter.

He was fortunate, however, in seeing her at a short distance a few hours later, but when two days passed after that and she was nowhere to be found he became alarmed, and, risking the consequences of the gossip which was certain to ensue, he made inquiries. It was his host who told him all about the beauty who had captured the archduke's fancy.

"That's Milly Stubel," he said, with a careless laugh. "She's employed at the Opera House in Vienna. Her people live somewhere about here and she is spending a holiday with them. I suppose she will be going back to Vienna very soon."

That was sufficient for John Salvator. He could not bear to think that Milly Stubel should return to the capital, and, perhaps, to many admirers without knowing that he loved her. Discarding conventions he sought her out and walked boldly up to the little house where the girl's parents lived. When he asked for their daughter he was ushered into the spotlessly clean kitchen, and there he found the beauty of the woods busy making a cake. There was flour on the hand he insisted on taking and touching with his lips.

"I have just dropped in as a friend," he said, endeavouring to put the agitated family at

their case. "Your daughter is a musician. So am I. We will talk of our favourite operas."

They chatted for a long time, and Milly Stubel, even if she was only a ballet-girl quite unknown to fame, proved that she had received a very good education, and that she was quite well informed on the subject of music. Of course, they did not speak *all* the time of music.

John Salvator, Archduke and Imperial Highness, was more the girl's slave than ever, and he resolved that nothing should prevent him proposing to her. The old emperor at the head of all the degenerate Hapsburgs would not be able to part him from the girl who, in the most charming and natural manner, interrupted him half a dozen times because she had to see if the cake was done.

At their third interview he proposed to her. The girl knew by now that she loved him, but she was afraid. Alone there amid the grandeur of the mountains and the utter isolation from the sordid world called cities, she had seen only the charming, courteous gentleman who wooed her as an equal and always treated her with the greatest respect. But now, when marriage was talked of, there were other things to be taken into consideration.

"You will marry me, Milly?" he said deferentially. "You will trust your future to me? I will make you happy if you'll promise."

"Dare I?" she asked, the lovely face a trifle paler. "If it were only you I should not hesitate, but your relatives—what will they say?"

"I am my own master," said the Archduke John Salvator proudly. "I permit no one to interfere in my private affairs. Milly, don't be afraid. We may have to leave Austria, and I may have to work for my living, but I will do anything for your sake. I hate all this pomp and luxury. I shall be happiest when I am working for you. I will buy a ship, Milly, and captain it myself, for I have passed all the necessary examinations, and I hold a master mariner's certificate. There will be the nicest little cabin on board for us. We will sail round the world, and we shall be happy."

His rosy picture dispelled all her doubts.

"I will marry you when you like and wherever you like," she said impulsively, and kissed him.

Thus the die was cast, and all that remained to do ere the marriage took place was for the archduke to acquaint the emperor with his intention to marry a ballet girl from the Vienna Opera House.

The Austrian Court was one mass of red-tape. Moth-eaten and out-of-date rules and regulations governed everybody, from the highest to the lowest, and when the Archduke John Salvator sought an interview with the emperor he had to don a gorgeous uniform and decorate his person with all the orders he was entitled to before he could enter His Majesty's presence.

Thus attired he was received in private audience by Francis Joseph. There had never been any love lost between them, and when the old man's expression hardened as he acknowledged his relative's homage the latter did not

feel in the slightest degree nervous. John Salvator only despised all the pomp and vanity the emperor typified.

"I am here to acquaint your Majesty with my intention to marry," said the archduke, coming to the point at once.

"You mean you wish to ask my permission to unite yourself in matrimony with a princess," answered Francis Joseph sharply.

"I do not require permission," said the archduke, realising that he had better get the interview over as quickly as possible. "I want to inform you that I am going to marry a girl of the people. Her name is Milly Stubel, and she earns her living at the Opera House."

The emperor's face was livid now.

"How dare you insult me?" he cried in a fury. "Leave my presence at once. You are to consider yourself under close arrest. This madness must not go any further. The girl shall be banished, and——"

John Salvator restrained himself no longer.

"If a hair of her head is touched I shall hold you responsible," he thundered, raising a clenched fist. "Don't forget that. If she is injured I'll make you pay for it even if I have to force my way in here and take you by the throat. I am a man—not a machine. From this moment I renounce all my rights as an Austrian archduke, and I renounce you as my emperor. That is all, and now I have the honour to wish you good day."

But the emperor was not so easily disposed of. As the archduke was turning to leave the apart-

ment Francis Joseph sprang at him, and with his own hands tore off the medals that adorned his uniform.

"Now you can go," he shrieked, his hands falling to his side. "Get beyond the frontier as quickly as you can. Go before I change my mind and summon the secret police. But for the scandal I would——"

John Salvator did not hear the finish of the threat. He was alarmed now for the safety of the girl he loved, for he knew that Francis Joseph had in his pay men capable of murdering the ballet girl. He went straight from the palace to the humble lodgings where she was awaiting him in fear and trembling.

"We must leave for London at once, Milly," he said, taking her in his arms. "There is too much danger on Austrian soil. We can't be married here. I have had a row with the emperor. Thank God, I am finished with him and his for ever. How long will it take you to pack?"

She answered that she would be ready in a few minutes. Milly Stubel was so much in love with him that she would not have given him up now no matter how great the inducement. She was very anxious on his behalf, and, woman-like, she wished to protect and watch over him.

Whilst she was in the next room packing, the archduke stood by the window and looked down into the somewhat squalid street. Pedestrians were passing to and fro. He watched them carelessly until he realised that two men unobtrusively dressed had sauntered past the house

six times in less than five minutes. Then the truth flashed across his brain. The secret police, instructed by the emperor, had begun their work already. They were only waiting for Milly Stubel to leave the house to seize her and carry her off to a waiting carriage, and she would be heard of no more. It was a way they had in Austria even in the twentieth century.

The exasperated lover did not hesitate. He rushed out of the house and gripped one of the detectives by the coat-collar.

"I know who you are, and what you are here for," he said in a low, threatening tone. "I am the Archduke John Salvator, and I order you to cease to molest my future wife. If you disobey me I will call the police and give you in charge. Your master, the emperor, won't forgive you if you are the means of creating a public scandal. Now call your fellow-bloodhound off, and let me see no more of you."

The terrified hireling slunk away, thoroughly cowed, and a few minutes later the archduke and the ballet girl drove to the station and began their journey to London. The moment they left Austrian soil he discarded his rank and title. "I am now John Orth," he cried exultantly. "Never again shall I be addressed as Imperial Highness. Thank goodness, Milly, I am free at last!"

The lovers immediately on their arrival in London went to a small hotel in a street off the Strand. "John Orth"—the name he had decided to use henceforth—was well aware that he and Milly Stubel had been followed from

Austria and that he must be wary if he wished to achieve his object. The emperor's emissaries would do their best to prevent him marrying the girl he loved, and the archduke took steps in London to frustrate their designs.

It was late in the afternoon that he slipped out of the hotel and made his way to a certain registry office in the neighbourhood, where he informed the official in charge that on a certain date he would arrive with a lady to whom he wished to be married by the laws of England. When asked for names and other particulars, he gave his own as "John Orth," and his profession as that of master-mariner. Milly Stubel was described as an actress, and her real name was divulged.

"John Orth" quickly made up his mind, and instead of returning to the hotel immediately, he went for a long walk, not troubling what direction he took, and only stopping an hour later to ask a policeman the way to the nearest registry office. He soon found himself in the desired place, and for the second time that day he gave notice of his intention to wed. On this occasion, however, he took particular care to prevent his secret leaking out, and the commonplace English names he mentioned to the official were nothing like those of John Orth and Milly Stubel.

That was how the archduke was married in secret. The Austrian detectives hovered round the registry office in the neighbourhood of the Strand, whilst two miles away the archduke was united to the girl for whom he had sacrificed rank

and fortune. The ceremony was a brief, matter-of-fact marriage before a registrar. But the lovers were contented and happy, for no power on earth could separate them now.

After their marriage they left London. Already John Orth's agents had received instructions to buy on his behalf a serviceable steamer capable of making lengthy voyages. When they notified him that there was such a ship, the *Sainte Marguerite*, he gave orders that it should be legally transferred to him. The purchase price was duly paid, and the ex-archduke prepared for his first voyage.

It had been his intention to captain the ship himself, but at the last moment he changed his mind, and a seaman of the name of Sodich was given the post, the bridegroom contenting himself with the rôle of passenger. After all, it was his honeymoon, and he wished to devote himself to the girl who had exiled herself from her family for his sake.

Before they set sail "John Orth" was interviewed by a special envoy from the Emperor Francis Joseph. The latter seemed to have been seized with an intense desire to have the Archduke John Salvator back in his own dominions and through his representative he now offered to restore his rank and honours to him if he would return quietly to Vienna. As for Milly Stubel, the emperor's envoy casually remarked that it would be easy to dispose of her. The emperor's sanction not having been obtained to the marriage it could be declared null and void. As the fellow carelessly offered this solu-

tion, as he called it, he did not realise how near he was to finding "John Orth's" fist crashing into his flabby face.

"Return to your employer and tell him I'm too happy ever to wish to be miserable again," said "John Orth" proudly. "I would not give up my wife for the Crown of Austria itself, I only ask to be forgotten. I am now a man of the people."

The good ship *Sainte Marguerite* made the voyage to South America in gallant style, and "John Orth" was well pleased with her. It was a happy dreamy time for the lovers, and the perfection of the weather and the novelty of their first long journey together were events to be remembered. Every day added a stronger argument in favour of his new life. Here was real freedom and joy—in the Austria he had left behind were doubts, fears, depression, and despair.

They reached La Plata, in the Argentine, and "John Orth" was so pleased with the way events had shaped themselves that he now decided to captain the ship himself on her next voyage, and when a fresh cargo had been taken on board the usual preparations were made for the passage to Valparaiso. The ex-archduke and his bride were in a state of happy excitement, for this was to be the first test of his abilities. He was a certificated master-mariner, and now he was to prove he was capable of controlling a ship and her crew.

It was expected that he might have some trouble at La Plata in keeping his hands together,

but they experienced no difficulties whatever in this respect. By the end of the first voyage the men had grown to worship Milly Stubel, the beautiful wife of the mysterious passenger. She mingled freely among them, and she was responsible for the great improvement in their lot. Their food was more plentiful, and many vexatious little restrictions had been swept away. They called her their mascot. She was responsible, they declared, for a quick passage and the finest weather the oldest sailor amongst them could remember in an experience of the sea stretching over forty years. So they signed on again at La Plata with enthusiasm, and looked forward with eagerness to the second voyage.

"John Orth" was all impatience to begin. The ship was his hobby as well as his means of livelihood. He wanted to test himself. The life of a sea captain fascinated him. Years before, when he had been an officer in a regiment stationed at a town hundreds of miles from the nearest seaboard, he had expressed the opinion that only sailors were free because they saw the world and roamed about it. Now he had attained his ambition, and he longed to get away from the busy port and the somewhat squalid and unlovely creatures who infested it.

The longest day must come to an end, and at last Captain "John Orth" was able to give orders for the voyage to begin, although an hour before he went on board his ship he was advised by an old sailor to curb his impatience and wait a day or two.

"It's about the time when the gales start

round the Horn, cap'n," he said, the practised eye of the old salt having discovered that this captain was, after all, only an amateur.

"John Orth" laughed at his fears.

"My ship will weather any number of storms," he said proudly. "I am not afraid of the sea."

The *Sainte Marguerite* sailed from the Argentine with every prospect of success. Captain "John Orth" was in command now, and many persons in the harbour gazed with interest at the figures of the bearded seaman and the beautiful girl who stood side by side, and long after the ship had disappeared into the mists of the sea those who had been attracted by the gallant bearing of the captain and his wife stared after them as if expecting them to reappear, but they never saw them again—neither did anyone else in this world.

The ship sailed proudly and confidently although the clouds were dark and heavy and there was an ominous wind. "John Orth" and his bride laughed in the teeth of a growing gale. "It is splendid!" they cried in exultation. "This is life."

But suddenly out of the heavens there came a wind that tossed the ship like a cockle boat upon the face of the waters. Great waves rose to mountainous heights, and presently all hands were on deck grappling with the forces of angry Nature. Milly Stubel went below at the earnest entreaty of her husband, but she was soon back again, and when a flash of lightning revealed her husband's face she realised that he was afraid for her sake. She pressed him to tell her the

truth, and when at last his optimism collapsed he whispered that they were far from land and that the hold was fast filling with water.

The end came with awful suddenness, a huge wave engulfing the ship, and in one another's arms archduke and ballet girl passed into the next world where there are no class distinctions, and where every heart is justly judged.

When the *Sainte Marguerite* failed to reach Valparaiso the news was sent to the Emperor Francis Joseph. The wizened face lighted up at the intelligence, for he was glad to hear of the death of the man who had defied him for the sake of love. The arch-hypocrite had to pretend, however, that he was shocked and grieved, and he ordered an Austrian cruiser to make a search for the ill-fated ship. The cruiser spent many weeks in South American waters, but, of course, failed to find the slightest trace of the ship. The sea guarded its secret too well, and to this day it has not yielded it up.

CHAPTER IV

RUDOLPH'S DAUGHTER AND THE AUSTRIAN LIEUTENANT

AFTER the death of the Crown Prince Rudolph of Austria his only child, a girl, was handed over to the charge of her grandfather, the late Emperor Francis Joseph. Elizabeth was then a bright-eyed, merry little imp of five, who fascinated everybody with whom she came in contact. She was like a ray of sunshine in the gloomy Hofburg, and Francis Joseph, the autocratic monarch of millions, found himself so completely in the toils of the impulsive and self-willed child that he could never rule her. She did what she liked, and, because of the emperor's favour, no one dare correct her.

It was, however, significant that she did not regret the separation from her mother, the daughter of King Leopold II of Belgium. It may not have been altogether her fault because she had been educated to hate her; but Elizabeth was at an early age so worldly-wise and selfish that she proved herself to be a true Hapsburg. She liked her grandfather because he spoilt her, but anyone who opposed her wishes, however unreasonable they might be, earned her undying hatred. And the child was mother

of the woman. Francis Joseph indulged her, petted and encouraged her, but only when it was too late did he recognise that those very qualities he had admired and fostered were to prove the death-knell of his own ambitions concerning her.

Elizabeth's birth had, of course, proved a bitter disappointment to her parents, who had prayed for a son so that he might govern the Dual Monarchy when his turn came. However a girl was born, and, as the Salic Law obtained in Austria, she was not eligible to ascend the throne. In the course of time the Archduke Francis Ferdinand became heir, a man the emperor disliked and distrusted, especially when his morganatic wife, Katti Schratt, poisoned his mind against him.

Such was the state of affairs during the nineties of the last century. The heir to the throne was not a favourite at court, and the old emperor, who daily sought the society of his little granddaughter, wished that he had the power to abolish the Salic Law and declare her the Empress of Austria, and when discussing that possibility often referred to the great success Queen Victoria had achieved as a reigning monarch.

Every year saw the gulf between the emperor and his nephew widen, whilst his affection for the Princess Elizabeth grew stronger and stronger. She was a true Hapsburg, he often said with tears in his eyes, and the next moment would burst into passionate anger against the Archduke Ferdinand, whilst Katti Schratt, meek

and unobtrusive, would try to soothe him with honeyed phrases. Whenever these scenes took place in her presence Elizabeth would rush off to the beautiful gardens, and there the emperor would join her later, and she would imperiously order him to fetch and carry. The old man was delighted, for the princess brought some sunshine into the cold withered heart.

Meanwhile Katti Schratt and the kaiser—now, of course, dethroned and disgraced—were in constant correspondence on the subject of the Austrian succession. At one time Ferdinand had been friendly with Wilhelm II, but now the two men disliked each other heartily. The kaiser, therefore, urged the siren of the Hofburg to continue to press upon her morganatic husband the wisdom of declaring the Princess Elizabeth to be the heir, but Katti, shrewd and far-seeing, wrote back to the effect that there was a strong body of public opinion against the proposed change in the law and that it would be indiscreet for her to take too prominent a part in the controversy. She finally asked the German Emperor to pay a private visit to his fellow-monarch and discuss the problem with him.

There was nothing more agreeable to the kaiser, who always had a weakness for putting his finger in other people's pies, and at twenty-four hours' notice he set off on an incognito visit to the Emperor Francis Joseph at the Hofburg in Vienna. Everybody was, however, in the secret, because all the available police in the Austrian capital were ordered on special duty to guard the distinguished visitor. The

next morning Vienna knew that there were two emperors at the Hofburg.

Wilhelm II had set out for Austria inspired by one of his brilliant ideas. He said afterwards that he had dreamt it, and had been so impressed by the message "from Above" that he had on waking instantly committed it to writing. And what was the inspiration? Nothing less than the marriage of the Princess Elizabeth to his second son, Prince Eitel, to be followed by the promulgation of an edict by Francis Joseph to the effect that after his death Elizabeth would become Empress of Austria and Queen of Hungary, with the kaiser's son—her husband—as Prince Consort.

The kaiser arrived in Vienna in September, 1899. Elizabeth and Prince Eitel were then sixteen years of age, and, of course, would have had to wait a couple of years at least before marriage. However, that was not regarded as an obstacle. How Wilhelm congratulated himself on his originality and resource! Here was a unique opportunity to bring Austria completely under his sway. He could rely upon Eitel being something more than a mere Prince Consort. "Within a year of the old man's death," said the kaiser to his confidant, Prince Philip von Eulenberg, "Eitel will be Emperor of Austria. Then the two German-speaking nations will be one and indivisible."

The conference between the emperors seemed certain to result in a political triumph for the kaiser, especially as just before it took place a report was received from the court physicians

who had examined the Archduke Francis Ferdinand that His Royal and Imperial Highness was consumptive. He could therefore be discarded from their reckonings as it was hardly likely that a dying man would bother about politics. The kaiser was particularly pleased with this, and Francis Joseph was delighted to find a powerful monarch who wished to further the ambition of the girl who was his pet and the life and soul of the Hofburg.

Francis Joseph, however, would not push matters. He preferred to wait a little. Perhaps he guessed that the high-spirited princess would not permit herself to be dragooned into an engagement, and he was positive that she would resent the somewhat Prussian manner of the German Emperor. He therefore advised caution, and as the young people were not yet of age, the kaiser agreed, all the more willingly because he was certain in his own mind that his plans would succeed.

It was decided that another year should be allowed to elapse before the two men brought up the subject again. Meanwhile the Princess Elizabeth was to go into society and meet all sorts and conditions of men. Francis Joseph, however, was inspired by a selfish reason. He did not wish to lose Elizabeth just yet. Her marriage would mean she would have to set up a separate establishment, and after that the Hofburg would seldom see her. That is why the emperor did not clinch the matrimonial bargain there and then with the kaiser. Francis Joseph had lost his wife by assassination the year before ;

his two daughters were not on speaking terms with him ; most of his relatives, the archdukes, were finding brides amongst the people ; and the old man was left in pathetic splendour, a solitary, out-of-date, and, at heart, miserable monarch.

I do not think that Elizabeth at that time was told about Prince Eitel. No good purpose would have been served by so doing. Although Eitel was only a schoolboy his reputation was already an evil one, but it was confined to Court circles, and a few years were to pass before he was to be generally known as the most depraved of the younger princes of Germany.

When Elizabeth had been confirmed preparations were begun for her first season in Vienna, where society used to be the gayest in the world. And the princess, entirely a creature of pleasure herself, wished for 'nothing better. She was proud of being the emperor's grand-daughter and favourite, and she meant to make the most of both positions to advance her own fortune.

Her first ball marked an epoch in her life, and it may be said to have altered the history of Austria. The proud girl was no beauty, but always dressed magnificently she carried herself so well that much of her plainness of feature was lost, and spectators saw in her the personification of Imperial dignity. She was, of course, the "star attraction" at the dance. As a royal princess, she had the privilege of commanding the best dancers, and, of course, there was keen competition for the honour of being her partner.

She danced until the early hours of the morn-

ing, enjoying herself thoroughly, and amongst the revellers who pleased her most was a young lieutenant in the Austrian Lancers of the name of Otto von Windischgraetz. He was very good-looking, and a superb dancer, and these qualities compensated Vienna society for a poorly lined purse and the disadvantage of being a very minor member of a noble family. Otto could have called himself a baron but he never used the title, because barons were too common, and, besides, he had no money with which to decorate it.

So he remained a pleasure-loving lieutenant, and only one of a huge crowd. When the Princess Elizabeth, the Emperor's granddaughter and the coming power in Austria, asked him to dance with her he was overwhelmed with the honour. The acquaintance of Her Royal Highness was something to be sought. He knew that it would give him a better standing in society, and if only it led to an invitation to one of the more intimate and select functions at the Hofburg his credit would be greatly strengthened, and he would be able to keep his many creditors at bay for some time longer.

What would he have thought if someone had whispered to him that night that the imperious princess was actually in love with him! Of course, he would have laughed the idea to scorn, for it was well known that Elizabeth had the pick of the princes of Europe at her disposal, and that she was very keen on wearing a crown. But love had humbled her. She who had dreamed

of a sceptre had lost her heart to a penniless "von" who had nothing to commend him except his good looks.

Elizabeth never forgot Otto von Windischgraetz after their first waltz. At first she was afraid of her thoughts but when she realised that there could be no happiness for her unless he became her husband she grew bolder. Within a month she was rearranging all her engagements in order that she might meet Otto again. She was due to spend a particular week with her aunt, but when she discovered that Otto was going to Laxemburg to play tennis, she went to Laxemburg too, and had the unspeakable joy of partnering him. Then there were informal dances at night, and the princess's only regret was that she could not have Otto to herself for every one.

All this was going on whilst Francis Joseph, Katti Schratt, and the kaiser were completing their plans for Elizabeth's betrothal to Prince Eitel. It was generally understood at both courts that as soon as Eitel became eighteen—which would be in 1901—the engagement was to be announced, the prince was to turn Roman Catholic, and the marriage was to be an accomplished fact within six months. The three plotters never imagined that Elizabeth had already made up her mind on this very important question.

Otto von Windischgraetz was flattered and pleased by the patronage of her Imperial Highness. He believed that it would lead to quick promotion for him in the army, and that when the

princess married she would make him one of her equerries and give him a well-paid appointment in her household. He let his creditors know this, and so won for himself another merry season in Vienna without being troubled by debt-collectors.

On reflection Elizabeth tried to steel her heart against him. She was very ambitious, and she knew that a morganatic marriage would relegate her to obscurity, especially when the emperor died and a second cousin of her own was the reigning monarch. Then she would no longer be a personage in society, and her enemies would take advantage of her *mésalliance* to keep her out of the Hofburg. Was love worth the sacrifice? She debated the question to which there could only be one answer. She could not be happy without the young lieutenant, and when she heard that there was a danger of his becoming engaged she resolved to act at once.

Never was there a more astonished young man than Otto von Windischgraetz when the Princess Elizabeth sent for him and told him that her hand and heart were at his disposal. He started in amazement and looked scared, and it required all her eloquence to persuade him that she was quite serious. He murmured how honoured he was, and then referred to the attitude of Francis Joseph. Elizabeth assured him that she would see to it that the emperor did not stand between them.

It was a glittering temptation to the penniless and obscure officer. The girl was enormously wealthy and, of course, powerful and influential. By marrying her he would raise himself into the

front rank of the nobility. The emperor would make him a prince, and his future would be splendid.

When Otto left her presence he scarcely knew whether he was walking on air or not. The interview had dazed him, and it was not until he had tossed off a couple of glasses of wine in a neighbouring restaurant that he fully realised that he was engaged to marry Her Royal and Imperial Highness the Princess Elizabeth of Austria. Then came the disquieting memory of the pretty little Vienna actress to whom he had been secretly engaged for three months.

Elizabeth had spoken very confidently of being able to manage her grandfather, but she was a little premature, for she was afraid of him, the chief reason for her uneasiness being the fact that Otto was a Protestant. This question of religion might prove an insuperable obstacle, but the self-willed girl was not going to be disappointed. She decided that if Francis Joseph declined to sanction the marriage she would defeat all his great schemes for her by entering a nunnery.

She had the courage of her convictions, however, and without any more delay she went to the private apartments of the emperor in the Hofburg and bluntly informed him that she had found a man after her own heart and that she would marry Otto von Windischgraetz or become a nun. She made the statement in one breath, and Francis Joseph, who was devoted to her, so far forgot himself as to hasten to assure her that she need not be distressed. He promised

to discuss the subject calmly with her, and he reminded her that her happiness was ever his first consideration.

But it was a staggering blow to his pride, and in that moment he saw the great scheme he and the kaiser had planned topple to the ground. His favourite grand-daughter was not going to be Empress of Austria after all. That hated and detestable Francis Ferdinand would succeed him. Francis Joseph shed a few tears of regret, whilst Elizabeth stood by his chair waiting for his decision. It came after a long pause.

"Many years ago, my dear," he said in a quivering voice, "when the fortunes of my family were at a low ebb and it seemed as if the Hapsburgs would be turned out of Austria, a certain loyal subject came to our aid and saved the throne for us. That man was Prince von Windischgraetz, an ancestor of your friend. Because of that I will consent to the union, and I will raise Otto to the rank of prince and Serene Highness. He must, of course, change his religion."

Francis Joseph rose to the occasion, and he was most generous to the lovers, and the wedding ceremony was a magnificent one. Elizabeth, indeed, might have been marrying a prince of the Blood Royal. All the members of the Windischgraetz family were there, of course, hungering for the loaves and fishes. And the emperor distributed honours to them with a lavish hand. An enormous sum of money was settled on the bride, and to prove his special regard for her Francis Joseph presented her with

the magnificent jewels which had been the property of his wife. The late Empress Elizabeth had had a craze for collecting jewels, and this present alone made her grand-daughter rich beyond the dreams of avarice.

But it happened that the very place selected for the honeymoon was also chosen by the girl to whom Otto had previously been engaged for the scene of a brief holiday from the cares of the theatre. I rather fancy that Otto gave her a hint as to where he was going to take his wife, for the same evening the actress arrived and entered into residence at the pretty little villa she had rented within a few hundred yards of the mansion where the married couple were honeymooning. Elizabeth, of course, had not the slightest suspicion, and her eyes were only opened by chance.

About a week after their arrival she missed Otto, and with a girlish laugh she began on her own account to search for him. He was not to be seen in the extensive grounds adjoining the palace, and she went farther afield. It was, of course, against the Hapsburg etiquette for Elizabeth to do anything for herself. She ought to have rung for a groom and dispatched him with a message to her husband. However, she had married for love, and she wanted to enjoy all the unconventional privileges of a morganatic union, and she walked to the high road where she met an old peasant woman who knew Otto but did not recognise his wife.

It happened that the woman had just seen the prince, and she was able to point out the

little house she had watched him enter. Otto, it seemed, was fairly well known in this district, a fact that surprised Elizabeth who had never heard him mention it before their honeymoon. However, she crossed a field and went up to the door of the house, intending to ask if her husband was there.

To her surprise the door was open, and she entered, and then something in the decoration of the interior aroused her suspicions, and she proceeded to explore. A few minutes later she had flung open the door of a room, and was regarding with frozen anger the spectacle of her husband embracing a pretty girl.

Now Elizabeth was, and still is, renowned for her temper. All her life she had been spoilt and given in to by the greatest in the land, and it nearly sent her out of her mind to see herself so grossly insulted by a petty nobleman and a common woman. So great was her temper that she could not control herself, and finding speech impossible she rushed at the actress and tried to seize her by the throat. Meanwhile, Otto escaped and perhaps we had better draw a veil over the scene that took place between them on her return to the mansion.

All this happened in 1902, and since then Elizabeth and her husband have led a cat-and-dog life. One must pity the Hapsburgs. Whether they marry for love or money they generally find unhappiness.

CHAPTER V

THE CROWN PRINCE RUDOLPH'S WIDOW

THE accession of the present King of the Belgians brought relief to many persons, especially to his cousins, the daughters of King Leopold. Princess Stephanie was particularly grateful to him. He has always been good to her, and his gentle, amiable character appealed strongly to the woman who has very few friends amongst her relatives.

I do not think that there is another woman in Europe who has had such an extraordinary career as Her Royal Highness the Princess Stephanie of Belgium, once known as the Crown Princess of Austria. She married her first husband for political reasons and experienced years of martyrdom; she married another for love, and has had no reason to regret it. It is interesting to note that her father married morganatically as did her only child. Thus three generations found mates outside what used to be termed in pre-revolution days "the charmed circle of royalty."

I will not enter into the details of her married life with the Crown Prince Rudolph. It is sufficient to say that when the news of the tragedy at Meyerling reached her and someone asked the

deserted wife and insulted widow if the death of her husband would break her heart she exposed her arms by way of answer. They were black and blue. "That is Rudolph's work," she said curtly, and no one ventured to mention the subject in her hearing again.

The death of Rudolph, however, affected her more than she thought. Stephanie, the daughter of Leopold II of Belgium, found herself practically without a country. She had been born in Belgium, but her marriage to Rudolph had made her a subject of Francis Joseph, yet from the moment she became a widow the emperor plainly indicated that he did not desire her presence in his dominions. Stephanie instantly communicated with her father, expecting to be welcomed back to her native land, but to her dismay he wrote peremptorily forbidding her to return. She did not know at the time that he wished to force a quarrel with her so that he might not have to give her any money. He wanted every penny for the lady he intended to marry as soon as he was free, and as this lady was a daughter of a French railway porter it is easy to guess that she had no fortune of her own.

Stephanie, a proud woman who had suffered much, scarcely knew what to do. She was out of favour with Francis Joseph, and her own father hated her. She had every right to live in Austria, but if the emperor had no power to expel her, he could see to it that her life was rendered as unhappy as possible, and she was acutely conscious of this.

Of course, the fawning parasites of both

monarchs did all they could to imitate the attitude of their leaders towards the unhappy widow. They simulated joy when Rudolph's will was read, and it was found to contain directions for removing his only child from the custody of her mother. Francis Joseph was delighted, too. He knew that the separation would greatly affect poor Stephanie, and he superintended the arrangement for the education of the Princess Elizabeth with a certain spiteful pleasure that was characteristic of him. Left a widow at twenty-five, the princess could not be expected to overcome her enemies, and she tried to find a little ease for her aching heart by wandering about Europe.

Meanwhile she had received letters from her mother, the Queen of the Belgians, which told their own story of suffering and wrong. All the world knew that Leopold was a brute and that he strove to create trouble between his wife and her children. Occasionally Leopold succeeded in making trouble between the queen and one or more of her three daughters, but Stephanie would never be lured into a quarrel with her mother because she knew that she was also suffering because of a loveless marriage.

The years passed by drearily. Stephanie's daughter merged from childhood into womanhood and was the pet of her grandfather. Except for a brief interview now and then mother and daughter never saw one another. Elizabeth was well aware that Francis Joseph would turn against her if she took her mother's side, and, being singularly worldly-wise and capricious, she

chose to be friendly with her grandfather and coldly polite to her only parent.

Stephanie's position was a most unhappy one. Alienated from her child, hated by her father, and detested by her father-in-law, and aware of her mother's sufferings, she was lonely and distracted. Whenever she summoned up sufficient courage to appear at the Austrian Court the emperor's reception was so hostile that she had to retire at once to her apartment to conceal her tears. Vienna was said at that time to be the gayest court in Europe, but Stephanie's was not the only broken heart in that assemblage of make-believe pleasure-seekers.

She was not destined, however, to be always alone. Naturally, Stephanie distrusted men. Her own husband and father had convinced her that men were not to be trusted, and she was, therefore, wary, but as the time passed and she became more resigned she began to take particular notice of one of her gentlemen-in-waiting, a Hungarian of the name of Count Lonyay. He was good-looking, with charming manners, and his whole-hearted devotion to the princess and his careful management of her affairs greatly touched her. When one has few friends they are doubly precious, and Lonyay's personality became more and more vivid to the princess.

It was, of course, for her to make the first advances, Count Lonyay's position precluded the slightest reference by him to any feeling of affection he may have had for her. But Stephanie meant to be certain of herself this time. She

knew that Lonyay was not rich, and that his attentions to her might be inspired by a desire to share her comfortable fortune and reap the benefit of the social promotion marriage with her would bring. She kept her own counsel until she was convinced that the count would prove all that she desired, and then she hinted that if he had no objection she would give him her hand in marriage. Lonyay had, of course, been prepared for this, and now he told her that he loved her and that henceforth he would be proud to protect her against her enemies. He added that he did not fear the miserable old monarchs in Vienna and Brussels; Stephanie and he had nothing to be ashamed of—neither Francis Joseph nor Leopold II could say as much.

Once the lovers had decided to marry they immediately communicated their intention to Stephanie's relatives. Leopold was secretly delighted. It was just what he wished. Now he would have a real grievance, one that would enable him to cut Stephanie off without even the proverbial shilling and also snatch from her the money he knew her mother intended to bequeath to her. Consequently, he telegraphed at once forbidding the union, and he sent a semi-official notice to the press condemning the proposed match in no uncertain terms. For once in his life Leopold posed as the virtuous father and loving husband, and a Frenchman who interviewed him at the time remarked, "His Majesty shed tears when he spoke of his daughter's *mésalliance*. It was an interesting spectacle because there are no crocodiles in

Brussels, and their tears are, therefore, very rare in Belgium." Leopold was furious when he read this, for it revealed to him the fact that everybody was laughing at him.

Francis Joseph also behaved like the heavy father in a melodrama. Little realising that Stephanie's daughter, his own particular favourite, was destined to emulate her mother and marry out of the purple, he took the girl to his arms and sobbed about the disgrace of her mother—his only son's widow—marrying a Hungarian nobleman. I should mention that when this affecting scene took place Francis Joseph did not know that Leopold of Belgium also opposed the match. He considered that as Stephanie had become a subject of his by marriage her father had no right to interfere in the matter at all.

While the Emperor of Austria and the King of the Belgians were working themselves into artificial furies Stephanie was proceeding quietly with the preparations for her marriage, and in her happiness looked ten years younger. To a friend she sent a pathetic letter extolling the virtues of her fiancé. "Is it possible?" she wrote. "A long, long terrible night has gone by for me and I see a rosy dawn of hope on the clouded sky, a ray of light which tells of the rising sun of joy. Will the sun rise in full glory? Will he warm me with his rays and dry the tears from my cheeks? Come, my sun, come. You find a poor faded flower, whose freshness has been destroyed by the hard frost of fate."

She had many adventures, however, before

the ceremony took place. She naturally wished to see her mother, and to achieve this she had to enter Brussels like a thief in the night and steal surreptitiously into the room where the unfortunate queen was awaiting her. The two women spent an hour together before the approach of King Leopold's brutal emissaries caused them to part in terror, and the next morning the princess was roughly conducted out of the country by her father's secret police. He had behaved like a maniac when he heard of her presence on Belgian soil, for he was terrified lest she should contrive to obtain a large sum of money from her mother.

But when the princess's affairs were in a topsy-turvy state an extraordinary thing happened. Francis Joseph suddenly changed his mind and became her champion. The emperor who had once threatened her now sided with her, and he promised to approve of her morganatic marriage. He could not, of course, recognise Count Lonyay as her equal, but he declared that he would invite the count to the Hofburg, and not treat him as a pariah.

The reason for the emperor's change was quaint. It was simply because he did not wish to find himself in agreement with Leopold of Belgium on any single subject under the sun. For years the comic press of Europe had been accustomed to coupling Francis Joseph's name with Leopold's. They were represented as the two most ridiculous monarchs of the century, but while in Austria such statements were severely punished, in Belgium they could be

made with impunity. The democratic Belgians would not tolerate prosecutions for plain speaking, and Leopold, who liked his job, did not wish to run any risk of losing it.

Francis Joseph, therefore, hated Leopold, and just to annoy him he went over to Stephanie's side. Leopold retaliated by withdrawing his daughter's allowance of two thousand pounds a year and forbidding her to use the prefix of "Royal Highness." The emperor's counter-stroke was to send Stephanie a cheque for fifty thousand pounds. Leopold, when he heard of this, gnashed his teeth and vented his rage upon his helpless wife, for he knew that his daughter was going to be happy in spite of him, and he was really afraid lest the powerful support of the ruler of Austria would enable Stephanie to recover part of her mother's fortune when the queen died.

Leopold could lavish money on second-rate dancers and beauties from the chorus, but he was meanness personified on all other occasions, yet he spent a considerable amount on agents who did all they could to sow dissension between Stephanie and Count Lonyay. Men and women were employed, and at his instigation some of the most unscrupulous women in Europe wrote letters to the princess claiming Lonyay as their property. The clumsy trick, however, was foredoomed to failure, and the last seen of the ignoble army of spies and mischief-makers was on a certain summer night, when the count, coming unexpectedly upon one of them, literally kicked him out of the grounds.

Only one person could have postponed indefinitely the marriage of the lovers and that was the Queen of the Belgians. Stephanie was well aware that her mother was cruelly ill-treated by Leopold, and she feared that it would become worse if she married. She, therefore, ran the gauntlet again, and made her way into the queen's presence to take her in her arms and whisper that to please her she would wait until her death before becoming a bride for the second time. But her Majesty, a sweet, gentle, and gracious lady, told her that nothing could possibly make her life worse than it was.

"Marry Count Lonyay and be happy, my dear," she said as she kissed her trembling daughter. "You and I know the unhappiness caused by the rigid rules a princess is expected to obey. I would to God I had had the courage to marry for love."

The sole barrier was thus removed, and Stephanie and the count proceeded with their final preparations. Had it not been for the consent of Francis Joseph, however, the princess would have found it difficult to procure a priest to perform the ceremony.

In the presence of a small coterie of well-wishers, the Belgian princess was married morganatically to Count Lonyay. At the time the war between Great Britain and South Africa was at its most critical stage, and there were not many persons who turned aside from reading about that drama to be interested in the wedding of King Leopold's daughter. Those most concerned were grateful for this public indifference.

Privacy was what they desired, and they, at any rate, had reason to be grateful that the year 1900 was disturbed by a war and the rumours of more wars.

The first tragedy in Stephanie's life after her morganatic marriage was the death of her mother. Although aware that it was a happy release for that ill-used lady she could not help mourning for one whose married life had been a dismal and tragic failure. But it must have been some consolation to the queen before her death to know that there was no danger of Stephanie being unhappy and lonely again. Two years of married life had proved that her husband would always be a loyal gentleman and her best friend.

Brussels swarmed with German agents, many of them highly placed members of the Prussian aristocracy who toadied to Leopold for all they were worth. They applauded his behaviour, and privately urged him to marry his latest favourite, hoping thereby to create a gulf between Belgium and Great Britain.

It was an intrigue not without its amusing side, and it might have succeeded if Leopold had had the decency to conceal his sins, but he was quite incapable of doing that, and when he actually went to law over his wife's will and fought against his daughters to prevent them inheriting a penny, the world condemned him. The king won the lawsuit and gloated over his triumph, but could the martyred queen have been aware that her fortune was to be passed on to the miserable creatures from the gutter who

had replaced her in her husband's affections she must have turned in her grave.

Princess Stephanie, accompanied by her husband, put in an appearance at the Law Courts in Brussels, and when the verdict went against her she retired to her home in Austria, being anxious above all things not to cause any trouble. She took defeat calmly. Money was nothing to her now that she was a happy wife, and she envied no one.

The news of her daughter's engagement to Prince von Windischgraetz naturally excited her, but when the emperor sanctioned the union she was exasperated to hear that His Majesty had decided not to invite Count Lonyay to the ceremony. It was a blow in the face, and all the more annoying because it was so unexpected; but there was no appeal against it, and the princess saw her daughter wedded morganatically in the emperor's presence, whilst Count Lonyay was not permitted to be present because he was a morganatic husband. It was typical of the Hapsburgs.

There were other slights and insults which had to be ignored, but the happily married couple did not mind. Every succeeding year was making their position securer, and when it became evident that King Leopold had not long to live they knew that in his successor they would find a staunch friend. King Albert extended his protection to them from the day he inherited the crown. He had always liked Stephanie, and he found Count Lonyay modest and unassuming and not at all desirous of

pushing himself forward. Besides, King Albert, always kind and generous, knew how greatly Leopold's daughters had suffered, and one of his earliest acts was to invite Stephanie and Count Lonyay back to Belgium, and to help them to obtain a suitable residence in Brussels.

Leopold died in 1910, and for nearly four years the princess and the count lived quietly in the capital. It seemed that they were not to be disturbed again, but the outbreak of the Great War and the brutal German invasion compelled them to seek refuge in England. She and her husband returned to Belgium when the Central Powers were defeated. When we remember that had it not been for the death of the Crown Prince Rudolph she would now be Empress of Austria, it is indeed a strange turn of Fortune's wheel that the princess should owe allegiance to the country which helped so materially to crush German and Austrian tyranny and destroy the Hohenzollerns and the Hapsburgs.

CHAPTER VI

THE EX-KAISER'S FOURTH SON

WHEN the then Crown Prince of Germany became engaged to the sister of the Grand Duke of Mecklenburg-Schwerin it followed that the leading personages of Prussia and the Grand Duchy should be thrown much together. The self-sufficient heir to the Prussian Crown, blissfully ignorant of his fate, was proud of his fiancée and he went into ecstasies over her family. The Grand Duke was invited with his sister to stay in the Berlin Schloss and the New Palace at Potsdam, and as it was beneath his dignity to travel without his Minister of State he brought with him Count von Bassewitz Levetzow, a foxy Hun who hated the Hohenzollerns—he suspected them of wishing to capture his master's revenues for themselves—and a statesman with about as much diplomatic skill as would suffice to run a tenth-rate provincial village.

So the Mecklenburg-Schwerins and their friends for a time thronged the palaces of the kaiser, and the kaiserin made the acquaintance of all sorts and conditions of uncouth provincials, who ate a lot of food and spoiled her best carpets and talked of things she did not understand.

However, they had to be conciliated, and Her Majesty did her best to keep amiable. She, therefore, affected to be pleased when Count Bassewitz Levetzow formally presented his daughter Ina to her. Ina was then seventeen, and had a winsome manner, was shy and appealing and possessed blue eyes and a complexion not often to be found in Germany. The kaiserin and the girl became great friends at once, and, although the latter had to return to her governesses and her studies immediately after the wedding of the Grand Duchess Cecilie and the Crown Prince, it was practically decided that at the first opportunity she was to reappear at the Berlin Court in the capacity of maid-of-honour to Her Imperial Majesty the Empress Augusta Victoria.

Of course, Ina had met all the kaiser's sons in Berlin, amongst them Prince Oscar, whose awkwardness and clumsiness were in startling contrast to her own daintiness. The two saw a lot of one another, but neither guessed that one day they were to be man and wife. Had the idea occurred to anyone it would have raised an incredulous laugh. Other royal families might indulge in morganatic marriages, but not the kaiser's, for not since 1853 had a Hohenzollern married outside the pale. Fascinating Ina von Bassewitz was scarcely the person to overcome successfully the iron opposition of the semi-lunatic, whose madness had taken the shape of a belief that he was divine.

Ina spent a few more years in dull, third-rate Schwerin, the capital of the Duchy, before she

returned to Berlin, and was warmly welcomed by the empress, who wanted the companionship of a young, bright, and interesting girl, because she knew that she would soon lose her only daughter. Ina became the life and soul of the kaiserin's apartments in the Berlin Schloss. She was unaffected and unspoilt, and once the Crown Prince was good enough to remark that she was the best of the bunch in the palace. She had enemies, of course, jealous ladies of uncertain age who hated her because she had supplanted them in the favour of the kaiserin, but Ina was not worried, for she was treated as one of the family party and had the confidence of the empress.

Prince Oscar at this time was with his regiment at Potsdam. His mother did not encourage him to come to Berlin often, fearing that he might be contaminated by the black sheep of the family, Prince Eitel Frederick, who would not desert the gaieties of the capital, and who, as his father's favourite, practically did what he liked. Oscar, therefore, learned soldiering, and now and then came on a few days' visit to his parents, when Ina von Bassewitz usually helped to entertain him, and he was grateful to her in a condescending way, knowing that his father was just at that time in daily conference with his Chancellor on the subject of a suitable wife for him. It flattered the immature vanity of the youth to be told that only a princess of pure lineage and large dowry was worthy the honour of becoming his wife.

But when Oscar went away from the Berlin

Schloss he missed someone, and that someone was not his mother, for when he returned unexpectedly and the kaiserin was there without Ina—she had gone home for a few days to Schwerin—he could not overcome his feeling of loneliness. Then he admitted to himself that he cared for Ina, though he was not in love.

He hesitated to press his suit. It was obvious that his father would not hear of a morganatic marriage in the family. How often had he listened to his fierce criticisms on the irregular marriages of neighbouring royalties, and Ina was so petite and winsome that it seemed a shame to break her on the wheel of his father's wrath and vengeance.

Prince Oscar, therefore, waited, hoping perhaps that he would be able to forget her. He has never been remarkable for his courage, physical or moral. A mother's boy from his birth, he early developed into a soft-headed simpleton. At the beginning of the Great War he was officially reported wounded while on the Russian front, the truth being that the noise caused by a sudden fusillade from the enemy frightened him so much that he fell off his horse in a fit and had to be rushed back to Berlin by special train in order that nerve specialists might attend him. He was not the man, therefore, to fight against his father for the sake of a girl, or to be valiant when opposed.

A royal prince, especially the son of a reigning monarch, is always a favourite subject of the matrimonial gossips, and, of course, whenever he was in Berlin all eyes were fixed on Prince

Oscar. If he spoke for five minutes to a princess the fact was sure to be chronicled in the papers within the next twenty-four hours and half Berlin would believe that he had made up his mind to marry her. Accordingly, when the palace servants began to talk amongst themselves of the preference His Royal Highness was showing for the society of the kaiserin's maid-of-honour it was not long ere the gossip got beyond the palace walls. A brother-officer of the Crown Prince's casually referred to the rumour in his presence and that hare-brained individual instantly asserted his disbelief. He declared that Oscar would not do anything so foolish, and that he was merely passing the time with her. But for all his brave words he immediately cancelled several important engagements and went to Berlin to do a little spying on his own account.

It happened that Oscar and the Crown Prince were not and never had been friends. One of the former's first appointments in the late war was in a regiment which was ordered to Verdun, but it had to be revoked because Prince Oscar refused to serve under his brother. The Crown Prince had always sneered at the simpleton of the family, and now when he heard of the affair with the lady-in-waiting it afforded him exquisite delight to have the opportunity of doing something to thwart his young brother.

He came, therefore, to the Berlin Schloss, and, trying to imitate the ponderous pomposity of his father, was "graciously" condescending to Ina, and during his visit insisted upon all the formalities of royal etiquette being observed

to emphasise the gulf between them. He would, for example, remain standing for an unnecessarily long time so that the maid-of-honour could not sit down, and he always addressed her as though at a public reception even then the countess was the only person in the group not a member of the family.

The Crown Prince kept his ears and his eyes open, but until the day he was due to go back to his regiment he discovered nothing. Prince Oscar must have guessed that he was being spied upon, for his manner towards the Countess Ina was that of a friend and nothing more. But on this particular day something did happen.

Prince Eitel came to afternoon tea—a meal which in the Berlin Schloss consisted of tea, coffee, sandwiches, sausages, cold meats, and lager beer—and he paid particular attention to the sausages and the lager beer, of which he drank vast quantities, and as he had arrived in a bad temper it was soon evident that there would be trouble.

The favourite son of the ex-kaiser is a heavy drinker of the violent type. A certain proportion of drunkards are rendered quiescent by their indulgence in intoxicants, but Eitel always becomes morose and then savagely irritable as soon as the drink gets the better of him. And as he had made his way into the Schloss in a sober fury it will be readily guessed that it was not long before he was quarrelling with his relations. The Crown Prince, realising that a storm was imminent, sauntered out, not daring to risk an encounter with his big, heavy, coarse-

featured younger brother, and his sister also made herself scarce. Then the kaiserin and Oscar silently withdrew, taking with them Ina, who had been the only "outsider" at the tea-party.

However, Eitel was determined to have a row with someone. He was in a vile temper. That morning von Jagow, the chief of the Berlin Police, had come to him and in the most obsequious manner had informed him that unless he curbed himself there would be such a scandal as would drive Eitel out of the country. The vicious boor had hinted that von Jagow ought to have his enemies "removed," but as these enemies happened to belong to the family of Prince von Bulow, the ex-Chancellor of the Empire, Jagow confessed that they were beyond the reach of his uniformed cut-throats.

• An hour passed, and Prince Eitel began to resent his isolation in the great apartment, but when he tried to rise to his feet he experienced so much difficulty that he decided not to move from where he was. Just then the Countess Ina von Bassewitz entered in search of the book she had been reading to the kaiserin before tea. It was lying on the table near the window, and in going towards it she passed Prince Eitel, whose presence greatly surprised and alarmed her, for she would not have ventured back had she not believed that he had left the palace. The moment Eitel saw the pretty flushed face and dainty figure he staggered to his feet and advanced towards her, and putting an arm around her waist tried to kiss her. Seeing his purpose Ina screamed, and almost simultaneously Prince

Oscar rushed into the room. He had, in fact, followed her, hoping to get a few minutes alone with her there.

As I have said Prince Oscar is no hero, but for once love made him brave, and he did not hesitate to dart at Eitel, the bully of the family, and with a crashing blow send him to the floor. Of course, had the older brother been sober he would soon have disposed of Oscar, but in his drunken state he quickly found himself helpless on his back, whilst Oscar was consoling the frightened girl as he led her from the apartment.

The fat was in the fire now. Eitel's oaths and Ina's scream of terror had penetrated into the apartment where the kaiserin was awaiting her return. The Crown Prince heard the unusual noise, rushed upstairs, and found Oscar and Ina apparently in one another's arms, the kaiserin looking helplessly on, while even the belated appearance of her daughter failed to rouse her.

It was with extreme difficulty that the Crown Prince learnt the details of the brief encounter between the two brothers, and in giving a reason for his act Oscar blurted out a confession that he loved Ina von Bassewitz and that unless he were allowed to marry her he would leave the country. He was just finishing his dramatic confession when Eitel was heard approaching. Even the Crown Prince had the sense to realise that the ensuing scene would be unfit for ladies, and on his advice the kaiserin, Princess Augusta Victoria, and Ina hastily fled from the stable-yard language of the most depraved young man in all Germany.

The rôle of peacemaker was an unusual one for the Crown Prince to play, and he failed badly, though with Oscar's help he succeeded in preventing Eitel assaulting either of them. The kaiser's second son called them both all the ugly names he could think of, threatened violence to the countess and wound up by staggering about the palace, shouting for his father, and refusing to believe that the emperor was at Potsdam and was not expected back until the morning. However, eventually drink overcame him, he dropped into a long slumber, and was carried by the servants to bed.

Meanwhile, in another part of the Schloss the kaiserin, her eldest son, Prince Oscar, and Ina von Bassewitz were considering the situation. The Crown Prince treated Ina coldly, while the kaiserin was hysterical and affectionate in turns. She had long since guessed that Oscar was in love with her pretty maid-of-honour, but now that the fact was no longer a secret she trembled when she wondered what her husband would say, for Eitel would be sure to tell him in the morning. In the circumstances they dare not attempt to cajole him into secrecy.

The Crown Prince advised the lovers to be "sensible" and realise that marriage was out of the question. He actually told his mother to send the girl home, and thereby remove temptation out of the way of Oscar; but the latter strenuously opposed that plan, swearing on his honour to follow Ina wherever she went and not leave her side unless dragged from it by force.

The empress's sympathies were with Oscar, who, she believed, was chivalrous and brave. He concealed nothing now, and the bright, responsive glances the girl gave him proved that she was just as deeply in love with him, and was willing to face a scene with the kaiser for his sake.

"I will see father myself about it," he said, for he could talk like this when the "old man" was far away. His doting mother smiled, knowing his character better, but she insisted on her eldest son leaving the room with her so that the lovers could be alone. I should mention that this happened early in the month of February, 1914. The date is of vital importance, as the sequel proves.

Next morning the kaiser reappeared at the Berlin Schloss, and Prince Eitel, the favourite, was the first to see him. Oscar and Ina remained with the empress, momentarily expecting to see the emperor fling himself into their presence in a rage. But the minutes passed and nobody came, and then Prince Oscar, who was not well, timidly asked his mother to go to his father and ask permission for him to become betrothed to Ina.

Her Majesty consented. She would have done more for her fourth son, whom she idolised, though this was a very severe ordeal for her. The kaiser, then busy with the preliminary plans of the war he intended to force upon Europe, received her with coldness and suspicion. Prince Eitel had just accused her of having encouraged Oscar to contemplate a morganatic marriage,

and the idea had nearly sent the all-Highest — how absurd that self-bestowed title reads nowadays! — into one of his fits of fury which generally ended in a real fit and the urgent attendance of the court doctors. So when his wife nervously began her request he interrupted her brutally and in the plainest language told her that she was a fool to think of it, concluding with the statement that Ina von Bassewitz would be given exactly one hour to clear out of Berlin. If she proved rebellious he swore he would have her conducted back to dismal, provincial Schwerin by two common soldiers.

Poor Ina, of course, had to go, though Prince Oscar, in an angry scene with his father, had dared to answer threat with threat.

Every day secret War Councils were being held in Berlin, but the kaiser had time to read the latest reports of Oscar's health, and was disturbed by the absence of any improvement. The kaiserin, too, was showing signs of breaking down under the strain, and, driven to desperation by Oscar's growing weakness, she sought out her husband again and again, and went through wordy battle after battle with him, urging, pleading, supplicating, and even threatening. Wilhelm II, harassed by differences amongst his chief advisers, and nervous about the outcome of the world war he was busy manufacturing, began to relent. After all, his other children were following in his footsteps and marrying for reasons of state and surely he could spare one son out of so many. To the inexpressible delight of the kaiserin he suddenly gave his consent to

the publication of the betrothal between His Royal Highness Prince Oscar of Prussia and the Countess Ina von Bassewitz.

The news, known in Berlin on the afternoon of May 26th, 1914, created a sensation. The kaiser's hatred of alliances with families of non-royal birth was well known, and there were many speculations as to the reason for the sudden change of front. We know it now. The kaiser was compelled to devote himself to his plans for war and, consequently, the morganatic marriage of his fourth son was of comparative unimportance. He therefore sacrificed his principles, and Oscar and Ina were the happiest couple in the empire of Germany.

But the troubles of the engaged couple did not end. A few weeks after the news of their betrothal Oscar heard something which convinced him that his father, who had in the meantime perfected his plans and was now merely waiting for the first excuse to start war, intended to go back upon his word and forbid the marriage. The state of his mind may be imagined. Even when the assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand and his wife brought about a crisis which kept the kaiser busy day and night, the lovers' peace of mind remained disturbed. Certain influences were undoubtedly at work to keep them dangling about until a convenient time when His Majesty would be able to banish Ina, send Oscar on a journey to the Russian frontier, where he would remain until he had forgotten Ina or had been fascinated by a girl of his own rank.

That decided Oscar, and crisis or no crisis he resolved to marry Ina at once and earn the right to protect her. He could guess how she would suffer if war came and his military duties prevented him redeeming his promise to make her his wife. He was told by a friend on July 30 that the plan of his foes—headed by Prince Eitel—was to order him to his post the moment war was declared, when, of course, he would have to obey his military superiors, who would not permit him to return to the capital.

On July 31 Ina unexpectedly came to Berlin to spend a few days with the kaiserin. Oscar met her at the station and drove her to the Schloss. Then he went out again, and had an interview with one of the court chaplains. From him he went to his father. The kaiser, harassed by the international crisis, was inclined to say "yes" to everything, and Oscar told him that on the following morning—August 1st—he and Ina were going to be married. As he made the announcement he did not know that the document lying on his father's desk awaiting his signature was a declaration of war against France and Russia.

The kaiser surrendered, and on August 1st Prince Oscar and Ina were married quietly. The streets of Berlin were thronged that day, but not on account of the first morganatic marriage in the Hohenzollern family for over sixty years. The people had assembled to read the proclamation of war against France and Russia, and in their excitement they hardly heard the church bells welcoming bride and bridegroom.

It will be seen that but for the war the marriage could not have taken place, and whether Prince Oscar and Ina have reason to be grateful time alone can show, though as far as we know they have not been unhappy in their home life. She was given the title of Countess von Repp, and when the kaiser fled to Holland the obscurity of his fourth son and the countess enabled them to avoid the limelight and to get away safely with their two children.

CHAPTER VII

AN ARCHDUKE AND AN ACTRESS

THE Emperor Francis Joseph was at the zenith of his power when his second cousin, the Archduke Henry, informed him one night after dinner at the Hofburg, the great Imperial palace in Vienna, that he had fallen in love with an actress of the name of Leopoldine Hoffmann. It happened that the emperor was in a good humour—wine and food were responsible for that—and he merely laughed at his young relative's confession.

"These actresses are very fascinating—on the stage, Henry," he said flippantly, "and they make pretty toys, but as wives—no, my dear fellow, you must not think of that."

The conversation was interrupted by the Empress Elizabeth, and the archduke soon afterwards left the palace. He was in an uncertain mood, for he knew that in his august relative's banter there had been an unmistakable hint that he would oppose his desires.

But an hour later the archduke was behind the scenes of a Vienna theatre chatting with the girl he loved whilst she was removing the powder and paint preparatory to returning home. She was very fond of Henry but at the same time was nervous when in his company. His atten-

tions to her had been noticed and friends had not failed to warn her that Francis Joseph was a dangerous person to defy. The emperor could smile and bow and look kind and benevolent in public, but she was informed that it was on his account that some of the foulest dungeons in the world had not been swept away in an era of reform.

"You will disappear suddenly one night, my dear," said her friend, Madame Breveau, a French actress who was performing in the same company. "Take my advice and leave the archduke alone, and if you value your own life do not consent to wed him."

It was good advice, undoubtedly, but useless because Leopoldine was in love with the Archduke Henry. She had not been attracted by his rank or wealth. She earned a good income and one quite sufficient for her needs, but the fair-haired young man who made love so prettily had won her heart, which was now in danger of being broken because she was told on every side that the emperor would separate for ever her lover and herself.

Francis Joseph had no objection to his cousin and the actress being friends—provided they did not marry one another. He wanted Henry to wed an Archduchess and settle down to a respectable life, and he smiled knowingly whenever gossip coupled Henry's name with Leopoldine's and assured his relatives that very soon Henry would get tired of his pretty plaything, return to the Hapsburg fold, and give no one any trouble.

This state of affairs continued for some months, but gradually the Archduke Henry came less and less to court. He must have been deeply in love, for the Hofburg was at this time the gayest palace in Europe. Every day was filled with the numerous diversions high rank and enormous wealth could command. Princes came from all over Europe and were glad to be allowed to participate, but the Archduke Henry, who had the entrée to it by right, was satisfied if he could spend an evening with Leopoldine. Sometimes when the girl was not acting she would accompany him for a walk, and often they would stand in the shadows opposite the Hofburg, watch in silence the brilliant illuminations and scan the faces of the leaders of Vienna society as they descended from their carriages to enter the presence of the Emperor of Austria.

Leopoldine was woman enough to long to take part in the festivities, but she realised that Henry was ready to sacrifice all this and more for her, and she repressed her feelings. Still she felt that she was as good as any of the Hapsburgs, better if honour and beauty and perfect health counted for anything.

Of course, the actress had other admirers, and the fact that there were rivals in the field again convinced the Archduke Henry that it was time she was his wife. He knew that she encouraged no one else, but he was anxious to remove temptation, and, accordingly, one afternoon he told her that he was going to make arrangements for an immediate marriage, beginning by

formally asking the emperor's permission, and if that was refused marrying without it.

In keeping with his promise Henry called at the Hofburg at what he considered a favourable time. The emperor received him at once and welcomed him cordially. To tell the truth he rather admired the character of his cousin, one of the very, very few Hapsburgs who were not degenerates.

Henry was nervous and Francis Joseph at his ease until the archduke announced the object of his visit. For a few moments the emperor refused to take him seriously, but when he understood that Henry had made up his mind he became furious. Threats, abuse, and protests came from him; his voice trembled with emotion and everything else failing he tearfully implored his cousin not to disgrace the family.

"Leopoldine will be a credit to us," said the archduke abruptly. "She is worth a dozen of the archduchesses, and you'd agree with me if you knew her."

The wrangle lasted over an hour, and Ministers of State waiting in an adjoining room heard the voices of the cousins raised in furious argument. Once or twice they were tempted to rush into the *salon* and interfere, for certain movements on the other side of the wall sounded as though the disputants had come to blows, but eventually the angry tones died down, and the banging of a door announced that the trying interview was at an end.

The Austrian Prime Minister found the emperor in tears—like all hypocrites, Francis Joseph

was able to cry at a moment's notice—and there was no Council of State that day because His Majesty declared he was too much upset by the “ingratitude” of his cousin. So off he went to bed, consoling himself as best he could with further threats against the archduke and his bride.

It goes without saying that Henry had not neglected the necessary precautions to protect the life of the actress. He was rich and could afford to retain a score of trusty ex-soldiers whose duty it was to act as private detectives, and keep at a distance all suspicious characters who attempted to approach Leopoldine's residence. With the emperor's threats ringing in his ears he went straight to her and told her what had occurred. She was frightened, but quickly regained her composure, and when he said that they must be married at once she agreed. She was certain that Henry would not desert her and that he would make a good and faithful husband, and events proved her right.

The plans of the lovers were simple enough. Leopoldine was not to give an inkling of her approaching marriage while Henry was arranging the final details. All he had to do was to find a priest willing to perform the ceremony, and this would be only a question of money. A substantial fee and any one of a thousand priests in Austria would risk the displeasure of their superiors.

With a light heart the archduke went to see an eminent cleric with whom he was on the best of terms, and he requested him to attend

one day and conduct the marriage service. To his surprise the priest refused, and then Henry learnt that the emperor had notified every bishop in Austria that he would visit his severest censure on any ecclesiastic who united the Archduke Henry and Leopoldine Hoffmann in the bonds of matrimony. The archduke, unable to believe that his cousin had the power to prevent the marriage, interviewed a score of clerics, but in each case was unsuccessful, though he offered a huge fee.

He was greatly perturbed because he wanted the marriage to take place on Austrian soil according to the rites of the Church. He was afraid that if Leopoldine and he emigrated and got married abroad the emperor might decline to recognise it as legal, but there could be no question about the marriage if an Austrian priest sanctioned it.

What was he to do? He did not consult Leopoldine because he feared that she might refuse to go any further, assigning as a reason that she did not wish to harm him. The actress had no idea that Francis Joseph was so bitterly opposed to her entry into his family, and the news that he had circularised his bishops about it would have unnerved her. Society did not realise how much the archduke was in love with Leopoldine Hoffmann. She was all the world to him, and he would have sacrificed the crown itself to win her.

One day he gave a luncheon party at his palace to a dozen intimate friends, including four ladies, but Leopoldine was not amongst them.

Someone was protesting that it was unlucky to sit down thirteen to a table when the door opened and a portly priest entered. He was ruddy-complexioned and evidently fond of the good things of life, and the Archduke Henry, who had known him for years, welcomed him cordially. The cleric, who was a member of an aristocratic family, had been for some time past head of a monastery two hundred miles from Vienna, and had got out of touch with Vienna society, but he, in common with the rest of his brethren, had received instructions not to marry the archduke and the actress no matter how much he was pressed to do so.

"I am expecting my cousin, the Archduchess Maria, soon," Henry announced, his gaze fixed upon the priest, "and when she arrives I will require the services of a priest to marry us. We have been secretly engaged for some time, and as I hate pomp and such fooleries I desire to be married quietly. My cousin is perfectly willing, but, my dear abbot, in case you should not feel equal to the arduous ceremony I will dispatch one of my friends to bring the Archbishop of Vienna, who will, no doubt, be delighted to oblige me."

The reference to the archbishop caused the priest's eyes to dilate. He did not wish that dignitary to see him in his present condition, and, besides, he wanted to have the great honour of uniting the prince and princess himself. It would perhaps lead to a bishopric. Of course, he would go to the Hofburg next day and beg for an audience with the emperor, and he pictured

the joyful gratitude of His Majesty when informed that he, the humble country abbot, had been the means of saving the Archduke Henry from the rapacious actress and marrying him to a respectable archduchess against whom nothing could be said except that she was of doubtful morals and sanity.

The abbot was in great form throughout the meal, and when the other guests began to chaff him he swore he would prove his sobriety by performing the ceremony. Immediately the party adjourned to another room, a smaller apartment which was badly lighted. Here they found all that the priest required, and within a few minutes a heavily veiled lady entered and took up her position beside the archduke.

The truth was that the priest was scarcely capable of understanding anything he was doing. His brain was completely numbed, he could hardly see, and, as is the rule with people in that state, he tried to keep his condition a secret by pretending that he saw everything clearly and that he was the only person quite at his ease.

However, he managed to perform the marriage service, and thus the Archduke Henry became the legal husband of Leopoldine Hoffmann, for, of course, the veiled lady was the actress. She had not been let into the secret of Henry's ruse, and in her excitement she never noticed that there was anything wrong with the fat abbot.

Six certificates of marriage were drawn up and signed by witnesses, the abbot, of course, appending his signature to each as the officiating clergyman. Then as the archduke had no further need

for his services he was bundled into a carriage and taken back to the house where he was staying. A few days later the abbot received a fee of one thousand pounds.

The unfortunate cleric did call at the Hofburg the next afternoon, and, as he was the nephew of a marquis, was received by Francis Joseph, who listened in ill-concealed astonishment to the priest's extraordinary news, but did not interrupt the flow of honeyed words.

The emperor, however, was not deceived for a moment, and when in icy tones he informed him that there was no eligible archduchess of the name of Maria and that there was no doubt that the lady who had become the wife of the archduke was Leopoldine Hoffmann, the priest gasped, and in a flash understood how he had been tricked. But the mischief was done and he eventually returned to his monastery with an intimation from Francis Joseph that his ecclesiastical superiors would shortly receive instructions to degrade him.

As for the archduke and his bride, the emperor promptly issued a notice depriving his cousin of all his honours and dignities and confiscating the revenues from his estates. He also notified his most influential subjects that anybody who received the archduke or his wife would incur his displeasure, and consequently the happy couple—for they were happy—thought it wise to leave Vienna and settle down in Switzerland.

They did not lack for money, for the archduke had transferred a large sum to his credit at his bankers in Paris, while very valuable securities

were consigned to the care of the Bank of England. In Switzerland they led quiet, uneventful lives and were not at all anxious to return to Austria. Now and then Francis Joseph sent an agent to the neighbourhood in which the lovers resided to draw up a report about them. It had been expected in Vienna that Henry would quickly grow tired of his low-born wife and that he would hunger for the wild gaieties of the most pleasure-seeking city in the world. But to the anger and astonishment of Francis Joseph everyone of his agents told him that the Archduke Henry and his wife were just as much in love with one another as ever they had been and that they and their little daughter—the only child of the union—were the happiest in a country of unambitious, contented folk.

Distracted as he was by the tragedies that marked his path from early youth to a desolate death in old age, Francis Joseph could not banish from his mind thoughts of the one member of his family who seemed to have found happiness. He had really never known peace himself, and he became anxious to make the acquaintance of the remarkable woman who had proved such a successful wife and mother. But he did not know how to accomplish his wish and at the same time do nothing to lower his dignity. After all, Leopoldine Hoffmann was only a common actress, and he was the greatest ruler in the world—at least he firmly believed that he was—and it would be a gross breach of etiquette if he noticed her.

Fifteen years went by, and at last Francis Joseph took the bold step of writing privately to his cousin and inviting him to call on him. The archduke promptly acquiesced and within a week was smoking an after-dinner cigar with his relative and telling in simple language the story of his long exile. The result of the meeting was that Francis Joseph requested the Archduke Henry to bring his wife back to Austria and live there for the rest of their lives, and when this was done the emperor restored him to his former position. Having made the acquaintance of Leopoldine and having realised that she was a good and noble woman he created her Countess of Waldeck, and thereby gave her an established position in Viennese society, which used to be the most exclusive in the world.

The Archduke Henry and his wife had now come into their own, but, pathetically enough, they were not destined to enjoy for long the sudden termination of their exile. The change from Switzerland to Vienna was not to their advantage, and within a year both were dead, leaving behind them their young daughter. The end came with startling suddenness and before they could make arrangements for their child, whose position was a difficult and precarious one. She would have no lack of money, but there seemed to be no one sufficiently interested in her to undertake the important duty of superintending her education and upbringing.

At the critical moment, however, when the affairs of the dead were in the greatest confusion the brother of the Archduke Henry came for-

ward and adopted the orphan. He and his wife had no children of their own, and as the Archduke Rainer was renowned for his kindness and generosity, and as his wife was equally beloved for her good works, it can be said that the little girl was lucky. The daughter of Leopoldine Hoffmann eventually married a wealthy nobleman, and her adopted father gave her a princely dowry, and although Francis Joseph saw little of her she was a favourite with her father's relatives, having inherited the vivacity and strong common sense of her more than remarkable mother.

CHAPTER VIII

THE QUEEN AND THE PRIVATE SOLDIER

It was a hot, dusty June day, and the soldier who was trudging along the high road that leads to Madrid was thinking of snatching a short rest on the hard turf when he heard the patter of horses' hoofs as the carriage of Her Majesty Queen Christina approached and passed him. The private soldier, who had been on a visit to an uncle who was a labourer on an estate a few miles from the capital, stood at attention whilst the ruler of his country went by, but it is doubtful if she noticed the tall, handsome figure and the dark, glowing eyes of this young man of twenty-two. For his part, he had seen the queen too often to be excited by this encounter, but when the carriages slowed down in the distance and the horses seemed to be crawling he suddenly caught sight of a tiny handkerchief lying in the road. Immediately he ran forward and picked it up, and it was scarcely necessary for him to glance at the royal monogram to realise that it was the property of the queen.

The carriage was a good way off, but Ferdinand Munoz was an athlete and it was easy enough for him to overtake it on foot. Then with the incomparable grace native to the humblest

Spaniard he returned the handkerchief to the queen, who looked smilingly into the handsome features of her soldier and thanked him with a nod. The next moment the coachman whipped up the horses and the queen was quickly out of sight.

That was the first meeting between Queen Christina and Ferdinand Munoz. No one could have realised what it was to lead to. Munoz was a private soldier; the queen the most powerful person in the kingdom of Spain, which she really governed, as her husband was an invalid and his days numbered.

Munoz continued his weary walk, and when he reached the little tobacconist's shop in one of the most obscure streets in Madrid he told his parents of his encounter with the queen, and over their humble supper that night the family discussed the stormy times in which they were living. Her Majesty's position was one of great danger. But if her Majesty had one devoted soldier it was young Munoz, who had been captivated by her gracious smile during that momentary meeting of eyes on the Madrid road.

Early next morning Munoz had to return to barracks, but whenever possible he helped his father in the shop, and occasionally he would take his sister, a laundress, to the theatre or to a bull fight. As yet Munoz had not fallen in love, although there were many pretty girls in the city who would have been happy to have been noticed by the handsome young soldier.

At least half a dozen different political parties

were struggling for supremacy, and all of them were preparing to take the field to battle for their rights when the king's death was announced.

Although long expected it created a crisis, but Queen Christina contrived to get herself appointed Regent during the minority of her daughter. Munoz watched events with a keen interest, never suspecting what was to follow.

Six weeks after the encounter with the queen he was about to close up his father's shop for the night when a heavily veiled lady entered and made a small purchase. While he served her she conversed with him, asking many questions, all of which he answered readily. She appeared to be greatly interested in him and his family, and when she returned the following night the soldier was hardly surprised. On this occasion old Munoz attended her, and within ten minutes the stranger was in the back room surrounded by the tobaccoist's numerous offspring, ranging from Ferdinand to a little girl not yet three. The lady, who seemed to be very fond of children, petted them and gave them presents of money and before she left promised to return and renew her acquaintance with them. Of course, the Munoz family made many guesses as to her identity, but none of them ever suspected that the veiled lady was Queen Christina, who had come to catch a glimpse of the handsome young soldier, whose personality she could not banish from her mind.

Queen Christina had not been a widow many weeks and her married life had been a chequered one. She was still young and handsome and

ambitious, and when she paid the first visit to the tobacconist's shop she had had an idea that closer contact with the hero of her dreams would disillusion her, but the contrary happened. She found Ferdinand Munoz kind and respectful to his father, a good son and brother, and a man of undoubted honour and integrity. There was something pathetically attractive in the happiness of this small shopkeeper's family. They had very little money and must at times have experienced the pangs of hunger, yet they were so contented and serene in their own company that the queen, who had dwelt in palaces all her life and had never known real happiness, envied them.

It was a revelation to her to find that pleasure could be derived from making children happy. Her own child, the infant Queen Isabella II, had been practically taken from her and was being brought up by the Ministers of State. But old Munoz had his children to keep him company, and they compensated for all the disadvantages of poverty.

The queen went away more in love than ever. Her position was not an enviable one. There was scarcely a man in all Spain she could trust, and she was aware that even in her own palace she was surrounded by enemies.

On the occasion of the fourth visit she asked Munoz to act as her escort to the end of the street. The soldier instantly placed himself at her service, and for a few minutes they walked side by side, the queen all the time striving to find words whereby she could express her feelings

without compromising her dignity. She was in love with the private soldier, and although she knew that marriage with him might cost her her position she was unable to draw back. At the corner of the street she suddenly stopped and confronted him. Then with a significant movement she uncovered her face. With a gasp of astonishment Munoz recognised his queen, but before he could utter a word she laid a warning hand on his arm.

"Do not speak, Ferdinand," she whispered, in a voice that thrilled him. "I wish to say something. Ferdinand, I want a real friend. Will you be the one man I can trust?" He was too astonished to answer. "I am very lonely, for one is always lonely when surrounded by enemies. I envy you your happiness. Ferdinand, I am not speaking as your queen, but just as a woman. Will you come to me if ever I send for you?"

He would have bowed to the earth before her, but she held him restrainingly by the arm and he could only say that he would always be her devoted slave; that henceforth he would wait day and night for her summons and that nothing except death should prevent him obeying it when it came.

She trembled so violently that Munoz for the first time suspected the truth. The queen was in love with him! The all-powerful Regent of the Kingdom of Spain wished to marry him, the private soldier, the son of a tobacconist, and the brother of a laundrymaid? It was the sort of thing to be read about in fairy stories, but in real life it seemed unbelievable.

"I must go now, Ferdinand," said Her Majesty, breaking in upon his reverie. "Do not tell anyone what I have confided in you. Wait patiently, and trust me. We shall have to be wary and ever on our guard."

There was, of course, no sleep for Munoz that night, and his father was so alarmed at his feverish restlessness that he wanted to call in the doctor. Ferdinand, however, laughed at his fears, and in the morning he found in the rough work of the shop a cure for his excitement. Now and then he asked himself if it could be true that he had talked to the queen in the streets the night before? It seemed like a dream to him. Would the queen send for him? Perhaps she was not in her right mind. Munoz was well aware of the efforts wealthy Spanish merchants made to enter the lowest ranks of the nobility and their failure to achieve their object. How then could he—a private soldier—become the husband of a queen? From sheer weariness he abandoned the task of trying to find a reason for anything, but nevertheless he lived daily in a state of suppressed excitement.

He had not long to wait. One morning he was notified by his captain that he was discharged from the army, and on the evening of the same day he was granted a commission and given a place in the Queen Regent's bodyguard. The dream was becoming true with a vengeance.

In his officer's uniform Munoz looked every inch a prince. He carried himself like a cavalier of distinction, and, despite a poor education, knew how to conduct himself, no matter what

society he found himself in. When Queen Christina inspected her bodyguard for the first time after the promotion of Munoz her eyes lighted up as she came face to face with him, and it sent a warm glow through her to hear the murmured admiration of her suite for Captain Munoz. It was gratifying to know that the noblemen and noblewomen who waited on her applauded her taste, though, of course, no one, not even Munoz, knew the queen had by now made up her mind to marry him.

But Her Majesty's infatuation did not pass unnoticed once Munoz was of her guard. The servants first gossiped about it, and by devious ways it reached the Council Chamber of the queen's ministers. A few were for opposing it with all the power they possessed, but there were some who were anxious to see the Queen Regent deposed and who imagined that if she married a common man she would lose her hold on the people. They, therefore, advised their colleagues to let well alone. Queen Christina might marry ex-private Munoz if she pleased, but the responsibility would be her own, and she would have no real cause for complaint if the consequences were not to her liking.

Meanwhile, the queen and her lover met daily. Her Majesty generally selected Captain Munoz to be her escort as she wandered through the magnificent gardens surrounding the palace. Sometimes when she wished to see Madrid after dark she would slip out of the palace with Munoz, and, heavily veiled, pass unnoticed through many streets until she came to the tobacconist's

shop. Those were great occasions for the little brothers and sisters of Munoz, for the royal lady was very gracious and tender towards them, taking a great liking to her. They prattled away quite unimpressed by her rank. The stolen visits were also precious to the queen, for she could descend from her high estate and be just an ordinary human being.

But she did not waste any time. The state of the country was so threatening that she was terrified lest a revolution should snatch her from her lover's side. She felt that Ferdinand Munoz was the only man who could make her happy. The more she knew of him the more she loved him. It was, indeed, an astonishing instance of love levelling all ranks. The proud queen only saw perfection in the tobacconist's son, and for his sake she was willing to sacrifice even her ambitions.

The marriage took place unexpectedly. Early one afternoon Christina heard that there was a conspiracy on foot against Munoz and to counteract it she decided to give him the right to call himself her husband. A priest was hurriedly sent for, and the Queen Regent instructed him to be ready in the private chapel attached to the palace at eight o'clock that night to marry her to the captain of her bodyguard. The ecclesiastic bowed and took his departure, and when Her Majesty entered the chapel Munoz was there, and the priest in full canonicals was waiting to make them man and wife.

The ceremony was performed in the presence of a few friends who could be trusted. Munoz

bore himself with becoming modesty, a trait in his character which had already made him one of the popular and respected persons at the court. No one knowing the man could resent his promotion, for he possessed that charm of manner which carries all before it.

It was, of course, necessary that Munoz should be given a title of nobility and accordingly the queen created him Duke of Rianzares. He was personally disinclined to decorate himself with a title. His only object and sole ambition was to make Christina happy and to guard her interests. For himself he required nothing. He was her servant, and the queen, who had been taught that every man had his price, realised that she had not made a mistake in marrying this man of the people. Carried away by his unostentatious devotion to her and his unselfishness she called a meeting of her ministers to see if it could not be possible to make her husband a king. It was done unknown to Munoz, and, astonishing to relate, the statesmen were so impressed with his loyalty and strong common sense that they agreed to support Her Majesty's proposal that Munoz should be crowned king of the largest Spanish foreign possession. Christina's idea was to get her husband recognised as a reigning monarch—the name of the country did not matter—and thus prepare the people for his accession to the throne of Spain.

But when she told Munoz of the proposed honour he refused it in the most emphatic manner.

"I do not wish to mix myself up in politics,"

he declared vehemently. "I am only the son of a tobacconist and not a statesman. I have no concern with courts and thrones. I married you, Christina, to make you happy, but we'll both be miserable if you start trying to find a crown for me. Tell your ministers that Ferdinand Munoz is not an intriguer, but the honoured servant of his queen."

No wonder Queen Christina loved him. For all his lack of education he proved himself to be a simple-hearted gentleman superior to the Spanish grandees who were hourly intriguing against the Royal Family they professed to serve.

The political events that followed did not arise out of Queen Christina's romantic marriage. They were the result of years of underground plotting on the part of her opponents, and when they succeeded in driving her from her kingdom she had good reason to congratulate herself upon having in Ferdinand Munoz a devoted husband who watched her interests. Spain was honey-combed with German spies, who were trying to make the people sick of the royal house and to tempt them to turn towards Germany for a new ruler. These agents encouraged all the contending parties alike; it did not matter to them which side temporarily won, provided the country was rent in twain, and the unfortunate people suffered.

Christina and Ferdinand took refuge in France, but the queen often visited Italy, where she had been born. She was anxious to regain her position, and by sheer strength of will she achieved her object. Once again she became

Queen Regent, but only for a time. Spain in those days was something like what Mexico is now, and it was impossible to be certain from day to day as to who was the ruler.

Amid all these changes Ferdinand Munoz never changed. When children came to him he worked as loyally on their behalf as he did for their mother. He was about the only man who refused to rob the Spanish treasury to benefit himself. Once he did really thrust himself forward and that was when he warned patriotic Spaniards that they were playing into the hands of Germany, but it was many years before his words were proved to be true. Germany eventually did succeed in forcing a Prussian on to the throne, but, fortunately for Spain, he was turned out soon afterwards and in true Hun fashion he scampered away the moment danger threatened.

It is extraordinary how Queen Christina's husband managed to steer clear of the intriguing parties. Never a rich man, he was offered millions to support certain pretenders to the throne, but he always refused. He advised Christina to abandon high politics when her daughter, Queen Isabella II, came of age and ascended the throne, but the fierce, ambitious spirit of the woman who had grown to love power could not be curbed. She plunged into the stormy arena, received hard blows, gave harder in return, while her husband stood in the background, his simple, soldierly mind puzzled by the fascination the bauble of power had for his wife.

For a brief period Christina and Munoz lived at Havre, distant spectators of the terrible wars devastating Spain. There they heard that Queen Isabella had been forced to fly for her life, with her infant son and heir lying at death's door. The boy recovered, and Isabella, who was remarkably like her mother, resolved to renew the battle to regain the throne. The time had passed when Christina was a candidate for it. She was now just a looker-on, and Europe, torn by revolutions and wars, was forgetting her and her husband. It was just what Munoz desired. He was anxious that his wife should settle down and enjoy a little peace.

Then came the war between France and Prussia. Munoz hoped France would win because he knew that Prussia had made the troubles of Spain a pretext for tricking France into war. It was ordained, however, that the Huns should win and that the cause of civilisation should be thrown back a hundred years. The defeat of France greatly affected Munoz, who in his exile had grown to love that country, and about the time the last German troops were evacuating French territory, when the last instalment of the great indemnity had been paid, Ferdinand Munoz, Duke of Rianzares, passed away, to the great grief of his family.

The widowed queen lived for five years longer, five years of vital importance to Spain, for she saw her grandson, the father of King Alfonso XIII, gain the throne and earn the goodwill of his people. The old feuds were forgotten and forty years of bloodshed came

to an end. Great Britain and France were more friendly disposed towards Spain, and a big effort was made to recover the lost ground. Queen Christina was now free to come and go as she pleased. She had not forfeited the respect of her fellow-rulers by her marriage to Munoz, for that marriage had been a success, and her marvellous courage and resource and wisdom had been of inestimable value to Spain.

"I have nothing else to live for but Spain," she said to the Prince of Wales, afterwards King Edward VII. "I only wish to see her protected from the Prussian wolf. If I could be certain of that I would die happy."

She died in 1878, a few years before the birth of Alfonso XIII. Could she have seen into the future and known that a British princess was to marry her great-grandson it would have afforded her exquisite delight, for she always admired Great Britain and France, and her idea of a league of nations to keep the peace was an alliance between those countries and Spain.

But history plays strange tricks with reputations, and for all her political achievements it is as the queen who married a private soldier that Christina will be remembered, for her love story is one of the most romantic of modern times.

CHAPTER IX

THE EX-CZAR'S BROTHER

THE Russian revolution temporarily brought to the fore a man not yet forty who once wished to be entirely forgotten. The Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovitch, brother of the late ex-czar and for ten years his heir, has never been fond of court life. When a small boy he rebelled against the strict etiquette that hampered him at every turn, and when he grew into manhood he was frankly bored by his exalted position. Because he was heir to the throne he could not do anything without obtaining the permission of his brother and the chief Ministers of State, and the Grand Duke felt as though he was living in a cage.

He watched his friends—and he had a great many—enjoy themselves in their own way whilst he was compelled to attend all sorts of stupid functions and act and talk like a machine. He was fond of outdoor sports, but indulgence in these was deemed undignified in an emperor's heir, and the Grand Duke had to give them up.

Meanwhile the czar and his wife were four times in succession disappointed with the birth of a daughter when a son was eagerly awaited.

The Grand Duke Michael was even more perturbed. He was longing for the day when the birth of a son to his brother would release him from his bondage, and when at last in 1904 the czar's hopes were gratified the Grand Duke's joy was almost pathetic. "Thank God," he exclaimed fervently, when an aide-de-camp brought him the joyful tidings. "Now I am free."

It was his duty to wait upon his brother and congratulate him, and the Grand Duke accordingly drove to the Imperial palace. When he entered the Czar's presence he was wearing the uniform of an officer of reserve, and when it was commented on he replied, "You see, I am no longer on the active list." Everyone present remarked on his extraordinary gaiety. He was like a man who had just found happiness.

From that moment he seemed a different person. He was popular, for no one could resist his charming, natural manner, and princes and peasants alike esteemed him. Above medium height, fair-faced, clear-eyed, and athletic-looking, the young duke typified all that was healthy and sane in the Romanoff family. When the motor-car was invented he went into ecstasies over it, and within a short time was one of the finest drivers in Russia. He learnt all about the practical side of the motor-car, too, and years ago many old-fashioned Russians were horrified to see the Grand Duke encased in overalls "tinkering" at his own car in a Petrograd suburb. But he was never a creature of pleasure.

During the last thirty years the conduct of the Russian Grand Dukes undoubtedly paved the way to Revolution. Michael Alexandrovitch—he must not be confounded with the Grand Duke Michael who married the Countess Torby—was a rare exception, and he gladly chose a soldier's career, and at his own request was appointed to the Blue Hussars, a very fine regiment which greatly distinguished itself as long as Russia was a potent factor in the Great War.

His fellow-officers welcomed him rapturously. Grand Dukes are as a rule not popular, but Michael was an exception. He was a sportsman to the finger-tips, a jolly good fellow, and, best of all, a born soldier. The Blue Hussars were proud of him, and he was proud of them. But as it happened his appointment to this crack corps was destined to alter his whole life.

Although not the actual heir to the throne—for which he was devoutly thankful—the Grand Duke Michael was conscious of the fact that only a delicate boy stood between himself and the crown. This was accentuated by the knowledge that in the event of the czar dying before the czarevitch came of age he would be the regent. His importance, therefore, was obvious and the czar watched his progress in the army with intense satisfaction.

Amongst his fellow-officers in the regiment was a certain Captain von Woulfert, and he, in common with the rest, eagerly sought the Grand Duke's acquaintance. Michael accepted invitations from them all in turns, and thus one evening he found himself dining with Woulfert

and his wife. He had before now caught a glimpse of Madame Woulfert, but this was the first time they met indoors, and it is no exaggeration to say the moment their eyes met he was fascinated by her.

It was an awkward position. Madame Woulfert was young, very pretty, and exceedingly witty. She was considered too good for Woulfert, who had inherited much of the boorishness of his German ancestors. Still, he was the husband of Nathalie Sergeevna, and Michael was too much of a gentleman to abuse his brother-officer's hospitality. But it was difficult for him to realise the bitter truth—that she could never be his. Had she been free he would there and then have offered to relinquish rank and wealth for her. He was now past thirty, and his brother and his mother had grown tired of urging him to marry, but Michael was not the man to fall in love too easily. He had met hundreds of pretty girls, not a few had “thrown themselves at his head,” but he was heart-whole until Madame Woulfert came across his path.

The dinner was for him a mixture of agony and pleasure. To be near Nathalie was intense joy; to know that she was another's was bitterness itself. He listened to her rippling laugh and beautifully-toned voice until he hardly knew where he was. Woulfert, delighted to have a Grand Duke sitting at his table, beamed upon him unconscious of the drama, of which that party was the first act.

Nathalie, of course, paid particular attention to the czar's brother. She had placed him next

to her at dinner, and most of her conversation was directed to him, and in the drawing-room afterwards she sang his favourite songs or chatted wittily on subjects in which he was specially interested. Michael left the house aware that he had never enjoyed himself so much, but he also knew that there could be no more happiness for him.

He had prided himself upon being love-proof, and now he was suddenly and overwhelmingly in love. It did not matter to him that she was not a princess. She was beautiful, dainty, and good. More than ever he cursed the fate which had made him the son of a czar, for the fact that Madame Woulfert was married precluded their union, even if she could divorce her husband, for a prince of the Blood Royal could not marry a divorced woman.

Michael and Nathalie met frequently after this, but by reason of his position the Grand Duke had to be careful not to create any scandal. When he entertained her and her husband he had to invite a dozen others, and at garden parties or race meetings when he approached her it was only to murmur a few conventional phrases and then turn to someone else, though his whole being was trembling with love for beautiful Nathalie Sergeevna, the wife of Captain von Woulfert.

But this sort of thing could not go on for ever. Michael's health was beginning to suffer, and he resolved to leave the Blue Hussars and take a commission in a regiment stationed a long distance away, so that he might forget the

woman who had won his heart. He requested his brother to give him another appointment, and, of course, the request was granted. The Blue Hussars were astonished at his desertion, and grieved, too, and his brother-officers asked him to remain, but he had to refuse without being able to tell them the truth.

It was his intention to depart without seeing Nathalie again when he unexpectedly met her at the house of a friend where he had called to say good-bye. For some moments they were alone in the big *salon*, and those moments were pregnant with fate, for some remark passed by Michael revealed to the astounded woman the truth, and she knew that it was because he loved her that he was practically exiling himself. Tears came into her eyes, tears that prevented her speaking until their hostess had found them, but before Michael left he had gathered that Nathalie was not happy and that only private considerations kept her from divorcing her husband.

All told not fifty words were spoken by Michael and Nathalie ; indeed, words were useless in the circumstances and would only have aggravated a position already impossible. So they parted with a handshake, and the Grand Duke went away to try and forget.

Two long years passed. Michael was now in command of the Tchernigoff Hussars and was renowned for his industry. No officer worked harder ; the poorest subaltern in the regiment devoted more time to pleasure than did the millionaire brother of the czar. Michael was,

indeed, doing his best to forget. He had read that hard work is an infallible cure for a troubled mind, and he tried the "cure," but somehow it failed. Even motoring could not distract his thoughts. He was always thinking of Nathalie Sergeevna.

A court official who was a personal friend came to see him to impart the news that the doctors believed that the czarevitch would not grow to manhood. "You will be our next czar," said the friend, and marvelled at the look of horror in Michael's eyes. "It is the worst news you could tell me," he said with a groan, remembering that it would be another obstacle to his happiness. The friend was astounded, but asked no questions.

But at the end of the two years a wonderful thing happened. He was motoring in the neighbourhood of Petrograd when he came upon a fellow-motorist in despair. The Grand Duke, of course, obeyed the rules of the road and went to the rescue, and when he saw that the heavily veiled lady in the car was Nathalie his joy was almost comic. There was only time for a few minutes' chat, but those few minutes made history, for Nathalie told him that she was free. She had divorced Captain von Woulfert a few months previously.

Before they parted she gave the Grand Duke her address, for she had taken a house in the capital and was living for the present in retirement. "You must make an exception in my favour," pleaded Michael, and her smile relieved his fears.

He dined with her a week later, and again the following night when he told her how he had thought of her during their long separation. Nathalie was a little frightened at his avowal. She understood the barrier his position as the czar's brother created. Marriage was not possible, yet neither could be happy unless they were legally man and wife.

When the great avowal came they formed their plans for their marriage with considerable cunning. Nathalie went on a visit to a friend at Vienna—at least that was what she told her Petrograd acquaintances—but in reality she took up her residence in a private hotel to await the arrival of the Grand Duke. He had a trusty agent and well-wisher in the Austrian capital, who found a priest who was willing to perform the ceremony. In view of recent history it is significant that the priest was a Serbian.

One night the Grand Duke Michael arrived in Vienna, travelling as an ordinary tourist. Nobody recognised him, and he was driven by an unsuspecting cabman to a private house. There he changed, and, as previously arranged, met Nathalie to whom he was married immediately. Two days later Michael returned to Petrograd alone.

The decisive step had been taken. He had married out of the purple and if his secret became known he would lose all his honours and perhaps his estates as well. He could picture the rage and mortification of his brother if he discovered what had happened, but he was consoled by the knowledge that the vast majority

of the Russian people would approve of his act, especially that large section of the population which was striving for political freedom. The Liberals and the Labour Party were aware that Michael was sympathetic towards them and that he shared many of their ideals, for he had travelled and he had learnt that his beloved country could not make real progress until it became free.

He and Nathalie were married in October, 1911, and they kept their secret until December, 1912. During the interval between these dates Michael devoted himself to his regiment. To all outward appearances he was still the sporting bachelor without a care in the world, but he must have been beset by worries, for every moment threatened to bring a crisis in his affairs.

The long-expected sensation came about in a dramatic manner. It fell out that a distinguished French statesman was on a visit to the czar, and His Majesty, in honour of his guest, held a grand review of his troops at the Krasnoe Selo. The Grand Duke Michael was present, heading a brilliant display by the Tchernigoff Hussars, and the czar was so pleased that his brother's regiment should prove the best of all that the same day he made out a commission in his favour as colonel of the Chevalier Guards.

It was the greatest compliment the Grand Duke Michael had ever received in his life. The command of the Chevalier Guards was not a sinecure, nor could it be earned by the accident of birth. It required personality as well as skill

in the art of soldiering, and so he was proud of an appointment clearly won by merit. He was, however, destined never to fill it.

Twelve hours after signing the commission the czar was informed by a German member of his suite, a Prussian spy who hated the democratic Grand Duke, that his brother had married a divorced woman of the name of Nathalie Sergeevna. The czar laughed incredulously, but his informant persevered and Michael was sent for. He came promptly, and when taxed admitted everything.

A conference ensued in which the czarina and the dowager-empress took part, along with the leading statesmen. All recognised that the morganatic marriage of the Grand Duke created a very difficult situation, and acting on the advice of the Prime Minister the czar tried to induce his brother to put Nathalie away. A divorce from her could be arranged with the greatest ease, and, the czar added, he need not fear that she would suffer financially, for a large sum would be settled on her. Further, Nathalie would be given the title of countess.

The attempt to make Michael desert his wife failed completely. He would not entertain the proposal for a fraction of a second. The exasperated czar turned to threats. He reminded the Duke Grand that he could take away his titles, his army rank, and his estates. Michael merely answered that nothing short of death would separate him from the woman he loved best on earth.

That conference lasted right into the early

hours of the morning. It was easy to threaten, but the czar and his advisers knew that Michael was about the most popular prince in the kingdom and that if the people got the impression that he was being persecuted they would demonstrate in his favour. They had to move warily, therefore, though the Grand Duke came to their aid by quietly agreeing to give up his position in Russia. He was frankly tired of his protracted separation from Nathalie and their son, and he was anxious to make a home for her where they could live as simple country folk.

In January, 1913, the czar issued a rescript removing his brother from his position as second heir to the throne, and placing his estates and revenues under the guardianship of a special Commission. He also accepted Michael's resignation from the Army.

The announcement, coming as it did after the public had heard of the marriage to Nathalie Sergeevna, was quietly received, for the Grand Duke's friends had let it be known that everything was being done to his satisfaction. When his excitement and worry were spent he was well pleased with what had happened. He was quite free now, he had achieved his ambition and was in a position to live like an ordinary human being.

Britain has ever been the resort of royalties seeking peace. Kings, queens, princes, and princesses from abroad have made their homes here when their native countries have proved inhospitable. It was so with the Grand Duke Michael. He brought his wife to this country,

and rented the Earl of Lytton's mansion, Knebworth House, at Stevenage in Hertfordshire, and to avoid too much publicity he and Nathalie passed under the names of M. and Madame Brassov.

They spent a pleasant time in England, where both of them became deservedly popular. Occasionally they were to be seen at "first-night" performances in town, but no one outside their intimates identified the Grand Duke in the person of M. Brassov. He and his wife were regarded as just well-to-do foreigners and their romantic story was not generally known.

When the Great War broke out he did not hesitate. He loved Russia, and he determined to fight for her, and the czar, aware that every man was needed, welcomed his aid, and at once gave him the command of his old regiment. To tell the truth, the czar had missed him and he would even have received Nathalie had it not been for the opposition of his pro-German statesman. They knew that Michael would unmask them: he had been the one Russian prince who had refused to worship Prussian "kultur" and they had intrigued to keep him in exile.

He was amongst the first to meet the foe in the field and for months was under fire, enduring reverses with the same fine spirit that he showed when victory came his way. But he knew that Petrograd was infested with German spies, and that his brother was surrounded by evil counsellors, and because he communicated his views to the leaders of the people they sent for him when

they planned the revolution, knowing that whatever the reconstructed Duma considered best would have his loyal support in the interests of the great Russian Empire, which has been hindered so long by the German influences around its Royal Court.

The change from peaceful revolution to blatant anarchy, however, sent the Grand Duke into hiding, and his fate is still uncertain.

CHAPTER X

THE ARCHDUKE CHARLES AND ELSA CZUBER

THE Archduke Charles, uncle of the ex-Emperor Karl, was a prince with democratic tastes, who associated only with decent people, and never tried to imitate his relation's notorious fondness for disreputable women. And yet when he announced his intention of marrying the well-educated, pretty, and charming daughter of a High School teacher, the old Emperor Francis Joseph offered greater opposition to the match than he did to other morganatic marriages in his family. He seemed to think that a third-rate actress with a shady character was more desirable as a wife than a refined and educated girl, and had not the archduke boldly resisted all attempts to destroy his happiness the emperor would have succeeded in parting him from Fräulein Czuber.

It is not so very many years since a man in the early thirties was seen sitting in the window of a cheap flat in one of the unfashionable quarters of Vienna. Beside him was a girl, and their arms were linked as they watched the crowded street. Suddenly a carman with a humorous turn of mind bellowed a question as to when they were going to be married. The fair-

haired occupant of the flat window readily answered him in kind, and the brief encounter drew the attention of the pedestrians, who surveyed the lovers with interest and sympathetically admitted that they looked very happy. But the interest increased a thousandfold when a woman who happened to be related to one of the servants at the Hofburg recognised in the young man the Archduke Charles, the nephew of the Emperor Francis Joseph. In her astonishment she proclaimed his identity, with the result that the archduke and the girl had to retreat hastily from the window and wait for hours before they could emerge into the street without being hailed by an enormous crowd.

This was a typical incident in the archduke's courtship. He loved to visit the Czubers in their homely, comfortable flat and partake of an appetising meal with them. He would leave the Hofburg and its luxuries to share sausages and mashed potatoes and Munich ale with the Czubers, and that it was no affectation on his part they knew quite well.

The girl who had attracted him was the very reverse of what the world expects an archduchess to be. She was quiet and restrained in manner : dressed soberly, and abhorred extravagance. Her learning also distinguished her from members of the House of Hapsburg, though her quality as a cook proved that she had not neglected the more human arts of the kitchen. When the Archduke Charles made her acquaintance one November evening as she was returning from the school where her father taught and he was

carrying a parcel, having scandalised the shop-keeper by insisting upon taking it home himself. Elsa Czuber, similarly laden, dropped hers, and Charles picked it up. After that it was only natural that they should enter into conversation, and, the young man's manner impressing the girl, she did not refuse his request to be presented to her parents.

The course of true love ran smoothly so far as the Czubers were concerned. Elsa was charmed by the archduke's character. He was so utterly different from the rest of his family that there would be no suspicion of his being a wolf in sheep's clothing. Vienna society offered nothing but riotous pleasure to him, but he deserted it to be near the Czubers, and the girl's father, who knew that his daughter was fit in every respect to take her place in the very highest rank, saw no reason why, if the young people really loved one another, they should not marry.

Of course, the constant association of the Archduke Charles with the Czubers was reported to the emperor, who as usual started by treating the matter lightly. In his younger days he had found victims amongst all classes, and when he had grown tired of them he had simply gone elsewhere in search of change. He felt certain that his nephew would not marry Elsa Czuber. Archdukes had led disreputable actresses and notorious adventuresses to the altar, but never had one married a girl of the people who was healthy and refined. So the old man plunged into State affairs, and when he met his nephew was polite to him.

There were so many archdukes at the Austrian Court, all growing rich at the expense of the downtrodden people, that scarcely anyone bothered about the absence of the Archduke Charles, but when the kaiser announced his intention to pay a visit to his old ally and dupe, the Emperor Francis Joseph, the latter issued orders that all his relatives were to attend in state the numerous functions to be held in honour of his distinguished visitor.

In common with the others, the Archduke Charles received the command. He had, of course, a residence in Vienna, a lordly palace filled with pampered servants, and it would have been easy enough for him to have attended the State Ball and dinner, but it happened that the kaiser's visit coincided with the annual migration of the Czubers to their cottage about forty miles from the capital, and the archduke did not take long to make up his mind what to do. He decided to accompany the Czubers and deprive the kaiser of the pleasure of his society. When he made his decision known Francis Joseph sent for him. Charles obeyed the summons at once, and the old man interviewed him on the subject of his infatuation for the Czubers. Charles plainly stated that he would not be in Vienna when the kaiser arrived. "But it is absolutely necessary that you should cultivate the acquaintance of our powerful ally," the emperor protested. "You forget that you are not so far off the throne. One day you may find yourself Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary."

"God forbid!" the archduke cried with sincerity, and the horror in his eyes annoyed the fanatic who, now that he had outgrown his sins, was wont to prate of the Divine right of kings and the happiness of being an emperor.

"You are very foolish," he snapped; "but I will not argue with you. You must attend the court during the kaiser's visit."

"It is quite impossible," said the archduke firmly. "You don't understand, my dear uncle; I have pledged my word to the Czubers. Besides, they can't do without me, as I have promised to help them to gather the fruit for the jam-making."

It was not easy to convince the emperor that his nephew was not joking. The idea of a real live archduke in his shirt-sleeves gathering fruit from trees and bushes and actually watching it boil, and, no doubt, taking his turn at stirring the mess, was beyond him. He declared that he was insulting him, but the archduke protested that he was speaking the sober truth. It was an annual affair in the Czuber family, this jam-making, he explained. They might be learned and, perhaps, a trifle staid, but every year they went to their modest country residence to pick the fruit, turn it into jam, and bring it back to the city.

The emperor had had a long and trying day, and he became too weak to continue the discussion. The archduke, therefore, retired, and the next afternoon was on his way to the country cottage to be the guest of the High School teacher for the jam-making season.

He worked very hard, too, and no one outside the Czubers knew who he was. The villagers only saw a healthy-looking man in his shirt sleeves working all day in the orchard, and as the kitchen was near the road they sometimes observed him in the evening standing beside the copper stirring the boiling fruit. They never guessed that the jam-maker was the Archduke Charles of Austria, who had preferred this sort of holiday to meeting the German Emperor and participating in numerous State dinners and balls in gay Vienna.

It was the happiest time of his life. Educated from his earliest years to the belief that everybody who was not of royal birth was not worth considering and that only the Hapsburgs experienced real pleasure, he suddenly discovered that only the good and the healthy are really happy. He knew that most archducal marriages were dismal failures. His own mother and father's was a case in point. Now and then the gutter-bred brides who had passed into the morganatic wing of the Hapsburg House had invited him to their homes. He had gone with enthusiasm, only to find that in their way they were just as bad and depraved as his relations who had married in their own sphere.

But Elsa Czuber, with the fair, fresh young face and the charming, homely manner, was different to all others. She was the very picture of health, and a good and devoted daughter. She was, in fact, the girl he loved. She had captured his heart and his head, and he was glad to think that his wife-to-be came of sound

stock. There would be no fear of madness if they married and had children. Epilepsy ran right through the Hapsburgs and it was time some new blood was introduced into the family.

It was during this jam-making season that the Archduke Charles told Elsa that he had made up his mind to inform the emperor of their approaching marriage. The girl was not dismayed. She loved him, and she had read all there was to be read about the family to which he belonged and she knew that it would be to his advantage to marry her. She had no wish to be an archduchess or even to decorate herself with a title. She was convinced that they would both be happy. He had shown that a quiet and unostentatious mode of living was to his liking, and she felt perfectly safe in entrusting herself to him.

The proposal was made beside the boiling fruit, and Elsa in her simple blouse and skirt, and the Archduke Charles in his soft shirt and tweed trousers, made a typical pair of country sweethearts. Perhaps he wished that he had not to go through the ordeal of another interview with his uncle, whose ideas were those of the tenth century, but he realised that it would be best for all concerned if he came to grips with the old man at once and settled the future without any further delay.

Francis Joseph was exasperated by his nephew's preference for the society of the school teacher's daughter over that of the German Emperor, and he was in a towering rage when the

archduke entered his apartment at the Hofburg rather unceremoniously.

"I suppose you've come to apologise for absenting yourself from the festivities in honour of the kaiser?" he said, in the shrill voice of the angry man who is suffering from senile decay. "Your absence was noticed and commented upon. I had to pretend that you were not well. I dare not admit that you were associating with a wretched girl in the country. Fortunately His Majesty was——"

"Look here, uncle," said the archduke, growing impatient at this rigmarole, "I haven't come to apologise, but to tell you that I am going to marry Fräulein Czuber."

The dramatic announcement was followed by a silence that lasted nearly a minute. The emperor's face was a study in conflicting emotions. He put up a hand to loosen his collar and half a dozen times he attempted to speak but on each occasion wrath prevented him. The archduke watched the struggle indifferently. Other relatives had gone through the ordeal of such a scene as this, and they had come to announce marriages with some of the worst women in Vienna. Now he was to marry a well-bred and cultured girl, and surely even Francis Joseph would realise that he might have done much worse. But the emperor did not. To him it appeared that the proposal was the result of a diseased brain. A Hapsburg marry a healthy, respectable girl! It was unthinkable.

"I decline to grant you permission," said the emperor, finding his voice at last. "I won't

have this disgrace brought upon my family. I shall be mocked at throughout the world. Charles, I forbid the marriage. I will give orders for the wretched woman to be deported——”

The archduke, pale with passion, brought his clenched fist down upon the table with a force that sent a shudder through the aged-weakened frame of the doddering old man.

“If you harm a hair of her head,” he cried savagely, “if you offer her the slightest insult I will place myself at the head of the Socialists and drive you and yours from the throne. The Socialists need only a leader of my rank to make them the most formidable and most powerful party in the State. Furthermore, I will reveal things that will send a thrill of horror through the world. I will tell them the truth about the Empress Elizabeth—I will reveal the fate of that nephew whose murder you connived at—I will——”

“For God’s sake, leave me!” screamed the old imbecile. But the archduke did not move.

“I must have your promise that you will not interfere with the Czubers,” he said, in a determined voice. “Unless you swear to respect them I will only leave you in order to find a mob and lead it against the Hofburg.”

For quite an hour the emperor tried to make his nephew promise not to marry Elsa Czuber, but, of course, he tried in vain. This was no temporary infatuation on the part of the Archduke Charles. He had known Elsa for over a year. He had associated with her at all times, and he knew her character thoroughly. He,

therefore, told the emperor that he was merely wasting his breath : and, finally, he conquered, for Francis Joseph admitted, with tears in his eyes, that he was helpless.

“ You will find her a different woman when you are married,” he said viciously. “ She will crave for a title. She will want to be introduced into society, perhaps into the Hofburg itself. I know these women. They talk glibly of sacrifices before marriage, but once they are legally united to one of my relatives they think that I ought to do nothing except gratify their absurd ambitions.”

The archduke laughed derisively.

“ I can promise you that you will never be troubled by Elsa,” he said, with a smile, “ and, in fact, you will never see her. I have already offered her a title of countess, but she has refused it ; indeed, she will marry me only on the condition that she is not to be required to assume a title of any sort.”

Francis Joseph sniffed incredulously.

“ It is a waste of time arguing,” he said curtly. “ You are a fool, and cannot help yourself. But I am sorry for you. You will be very unhappy. When you find that you are only a common middle-class married couple and not an Austrian archduke and archduchess you will realise what you have lost. Leave me, I am sick of your stupidity.”

“ You will not attempt any underhand tricks with the Czubers,” said the archduke sternly, staring into the soulless eyes.

“ I promise,” said the emperor, who was too

Austrian to resent the insult implied by the question.

"Very well then, but don't forget, uncle," said Charles, with the same sternness of demeanour, "that I will go to any extremes to avenge myself if any insult is offered to Elsa or her parents."

"Of course you will live out of Austria?" said Francis Joseph, with a snarl.

His nephew bowed.

"We have settled everything," he said calmly. "Even my new name. After my marriage I shall be known as Charles Burg, and we'll be none the worse for the change."

Although he had the solemn promise of his uncle that no harm should befall his sweetheart the archduke was too well acquainted with the weaknesses of his family to trust the emperor blindly. Money will buy anything in Austria, especially a policeman, and by a system of clever bribery the archduke bought over two Secret Service agents who were told off to shadow Elsa Czuber. They were merely required to report her movements daily and they were not authorised to interfere with her, but the girl's lover wished to be warned in case any severe measures were contemplated, and in return for a large sum of money he was given each night a copy of the day's report as forwarded to the private cabinet of the Emperor Francis Joseph.

The wedding of the archduke and the school teacher's daughter was, of course, a very quiet and unobtrusive one, and was attended only by the Czubers and two friends of the bridegroom.

There was, however, no fear or nervousness displayed. Nobody was ashamed or afraid. But he was the only person aware that there were two of the secret police outside the church and that the wheezy pew-cleaner was the wife of one of them. The emperor was evidently determined to shadow them until they were out of his dominions.

A gay and festive breakfast party followed the religious ceremony, and the bride's father made a humorous speech in which he declared that if his son-in-law was ever compelled to earn his own living he ought to set up as a manufacturer of jams. This was the keynote of the gathering, and no archduke had a more unconventional or free-from-care celebration of his wedding. He was greatly relieved to know that if he had gone to the church as His Imperial Highness the Archduke Charles of Austria he had left it as plain Charles Burg who was going with Frau Burg to live in a pleasant house in the Riviera.

As Charles Burg he was henceforth addressed by his friends. There was no more of the archduke about him. He was tired of everything that connected him with the Hapsburgs, and when towards the end of the breakfast the manager of the hotel informed him that an official from the Hofburg was inquiring for the Archduke Charles, he instructed him to inform the messenger there was no one there of that name. If he wanted Charles Burg, however, he was at his service.

The emperor's emissary returned to his master to report his reception and to ask for further

instructions. Meanwhile the party left the restaurant and made their way to the railway station, where the carriage had been booked in the train which was to start them on their honeymoon journey. The curious who paused to read the names of the persons for whom the carriage was reserved repeated them aloud but were not enlightened because they did not know as yet that Herr and Frau Burg were the Archduke Charles and Elsa Czuber.

There was the usual handshaking and renewal of congratulations whilst the interested station staff looked on in amusement. They had often witnessed such scenes before, and they only became really interested when they saw a man in the uniform of an Imperial messenger approaching the party. Then they crowded round to listen and to miss nothing.

Charles was standing beside the carriage door when the messenger handed him a long envelope bearing the Royal Seal. He glanced at the address and saw his name, "Herr Charles Burg." Then he tore it open, and with an amused glance at his wife proceeded to read the last message he ever received from the Emperor Francis Joseph. It was brief and to the point, for it forbade the unconventional prince to return to Austria again, and it formally deprived him of all his titles and estates. Then followed the signature of Francis Joseph, and underneath it in the tremulous handwriting of the old sinner were half a dozen words expressing loathing and contempt. Charles Burg thrust the letter into his pocket and raised his hat to his friends.

"Good-bye," he called out in a happy voice. "I thank you for all your kindness, and I am sorry we must leave you, but the train is about to start."

A moment later they were on their way to the Riviera.

CHAPTER XI

THE LAST BRITISH MORGANATIC MARRIAGE

It did not take the British people long to make up their minds about that detestable German invention, the morganatic marriage. They soon decided that it was unnatural, absurd, and out of date. They believe that a healthy British girl of sound stock is good enough for the greatest in the land, and in the year 1840 His Royal Highness the Duke of Cambridge, then heir to the throne of Great Britain and Ireland, showed that he held this view by marrying a pretty actress with whom he had fallen in love and always treating her as his equal even if he was prevented giving her the rank of duchess. When she died in 1890 after a superlatively happy married life of fifty years the sorrowing widower was able to record with deep sincerity that she had been his guide and inspiration, and now that he was without her he was like a ship without a rudder. It was a wonderful testimony to a union which once created tremendous opposition, but neither of them had any cause to regret that they successfully resisted all attempts to separate them.

George, the second Duke of Cambridge, was an impulsive generous boy of twenty when he

met Louisa Fairbrother, who was working hard at her profession, and who had every prospect of making a name for herself on the London stage. Queen Victoria had been over two years on the throne and until the birth of the Princess Royal the young duke was the heir-presumptive. Her Majesty was fond of him, as everybody was, and she was very anxious that he should wed a princess and thereby enhance the prestige of England on the Continent. The duke until he fell in love with Miss Fairbrother was accommodating enough, and really wished to please his cousin, but when he met a bevy of German princesses in London and another during a visit to Berlin, he made up his mind that no matter what happened he would not ask any one of them to be his wife. To tell the truth he always distrusted and disliked the Germans, declining right up to the day of his death in 1904 to accept them at their own valuation. It is worth recalling that he was one of the earliest critics who predicted the ex-Kaiser's future correctly, and although Queen Victoria thought him rather harsh at the time, she had reason afterwards to admit that he had been right.

Having ruled out the eligible Prussian princesses, the duke had an idea that he would never marry. He met scores of pretty and winsome ladies in society, but somehow they failed to appeal to him; for, young as he was, he had ideals, and, thanks to a very careful training, was never a fop or a mere man of pleasure.

It was just when he had resolved to remain a bachelor that chance brought him into con-

tact with Louisa Fairbrother, a divine creature with a beautiful face and figure and an indefinable charm of manner which combined with a happy faculty for saying the right thing at the right moment captivated everybody. Without more ado he fell in love with her. She was so different from all other women, so modest and winsome, that he lost his heart to her upon the spot. He had been told that actresses were loud-voiced and unconventional and pushing. Louisa Fairbrother was the reverse. In those days the standing of the theatrical profession was nothing like what it is now, and it was considered the very last thing in unconventionality to admit that one numbered an actor or actress amongst one's acquaintances. As lately as the sixties Queen Victoria hesitated to invite a celebrated actor to recite at a private party at Buckingham Palace because she feared he did not possess a dress suit!

When the beautiful girl acknowledged that she loved him he decided to marry her, and then the trouble began. Queen Victoria was furious when her cousin travelled down to Windsor to rave about the beauty he was going to make his wife. In vain did the youthful queen forbid the match; he defied her; and when she sharply criticised the class of bride, he asked her to give Miss Fairbrother an audience.

"You will change your mind about her in five minutes," he said, with boyish emotion. "Don't be unjust. Only receive her, and if after that you still think she's impossible I'll reconsider my decision; but I am confident

that Louisa will gain your love and sympathy."

The queen refused in peremptory tones. She had pointed out to the duke that he was her heir and that, even if she had children, he would always be so close to the throne that he and his wife would be called upon to take part in innumerable functions. For at least twenty years she would require his support and help in her manifold public duties, and "that woman" would always be in the way and, doubtless, would intrigue for royal recognition and a title and would give no one peace until she had obtained both.

It is easy to reconstruct the scene between the proud queen and the enthusiastic young lover, who knew better than anyone that he had found a rare and perfect treasure. But he left the royal presence greatly upset, though his resolution was not shaken in the slightest, for he meant to marry Louisa Fairbrother even if the world combined against him. And he soon did.

The marriage was naturally a quiet one, and there were very few persons present at the ceremony. London society pretended to be scandalised by the event. Several lords and dowagers of doubtful morals held their noses in the air and sniffed. After all, the duke might have gone to them for a bride, and not to the daughter of a man in humble circumstances. His choice was an insult to their caste. It was jealousy, of course, that caused them to talk of boycotting the duke's wife, and their oft-ex-

pressed opinion that he would desert her within a few years was a case of "the wish being father to the thought."

Had the marriage taken place even thirty years later than it did it is more than likely that the bride would have assumed her husband's rank, but in 1840 public opinion was not strong enough to emphasise the absurdity of the young wife calling herself Mrs. Fitzgeorge and beginning her new life in a house in Mayfair which was not the official home of her husband. The modest house in Queen Street was, however, his regular abode, and it was there that he passed the greater part of his life, and it was there that his three sons were born.

If their courtship had been idyllic, their married life was equally so. Mrs. Fitzgeorge kept out of court intrigues and held aloof from general society. She had her own circle of acquaintances, which included some of the most famous persons in the land, for gradually her fame extended and those who had the pleasure of being her guests never forgot her radiant personality, and began to wonder why it was that a lady obviously fit to occupy a throne should be merely styled a morganatic wife. Within ten years of her marriage she was queen of society, but she ruled by charm of manner rather than by her position as the Duke of Cambridge's wife. Inspired by her he rose rapidly in the public service, and there was no man who took his position more seriously or who devoted so much time to perfecting himself in order to justify his promotion.

For many years the duke had to do a great deal of entertaining on behalf of the queen, and in his stately residence in Pall Mall he entertained foreign royalties, great soldiers, renowned statesmen and diplomats, though there was ever something lacking because his wife was not present to do the honours. He was often urged to let her preside over these functions, but he wisely refused to expose her to the risk of being slighted. It was foreigners who were most to blame, and to spare her husband's feelings, she declined to take part in the festivities at Cambridge House. Queen Street was her domain, and there she reigned supreme, for everybody who came to see her paid her tribute and there was never any silly talk about her morganatic position when she was the hostess.

One of her greatest admirers was Mr. Gladstone, who hesitated before becoming acquainted with her lest both of them should be embarrassed, but to his surprise and pleasure he contracted with her one of the lasting friendships of his life. It was the same with numerous other celebrities, and those members of the Royal Family who were of English birth were amongst the first to admit that all of them had lost something when Queen Victoria decided that Louisa Fairbrother should not be given the rank of Duchess of Cambridge.

It was some time before the queen would receive her. She heard, of course, from time to time of her cousin's happiness and it was obvious that the marriage had proved a splendid thing for him and that, with the help of his clever and tactful wife, he was rapidly coming to the front. The

absence of any attempt by Mrs. Fitzgeorge to secure a title favourably impressed Her Majesty, but what astonished her most was the realisation of the fact that Louisa Fairbrother had captured London society. It annoyed her to be told that in Society she was always treated as the wife of a royal prince. Ladies and gentlemen paid her the respect and deference usually reserved for a princess of the Blood Royal. And the exactress had accomplished all this on her own without the aid of her husband whose plain speaking was proverbial and who never went out of his way to conciliate anyone.

Curiosity is a powerful agent, especially so far as women are concerned, and Queen Victoria was essentially human. She decided that she must see this wonderful wife and judge for herself whether rumour lied or exaggerated. A meeting between them was arranged, and it duly took place in the drawing-room of a certain duchess who was the queen's intimate friend. The affair was kept very quiet, because it was the queen's attitude towards her to remain the same, but the precaution proved absolutely unnecessary.

The two women met just as ordinary women do. The morganatic wife was still in love with her husband and she had only one ambition—to make him and their children happy. She was not very strong, and the quiet life she led was not distasteful to her. She was conscious, however, that she was the power behind her husband, and that she was fashioning his career. It was to her he came whenever he was in any

difficulty, and she knew when to tell him to reply to his numerous critics or leave them unanswered. She was, in fact, his wife and counsellor, and with him she had found happiness, which to her was greater than earthly rank.

The queen, on the other hand, was at the very height of her power and renown. The world had recognised in her a great ruler who was guiding the destinies of an immense Empire during its most critical years and doing so in a way that stamped her as a super-woman. Naturally she was proud. Queen Victoria was an intense believer in the divine rights of kings, and she loathed "morganatic marriages," always insisting upon maintaining the division between people of Royal Blood and the rest of humanity.

Well, we all live and learn, and one day the same queen was to gladly give her daughter to a Scottish nobleman and thank God that her child was marrying for love, and to grant her approval when a granddaughter also found a husband—also a Scot—outside the purple. Neither of these marriages was, of course, morganatic in the German sense of the term.

Such were the respective positions and characters of the queen and the morganatic wife when they met in a West End drawing-room. It had been intended that the interview should not last more than a quarter of an hour, but it was actually nearly two hours before Her Majesty brought it to an end by summoning a lady-in-waiting, who noticed at once that her royal mistress and Mrs. Fitzgeorge had been deeply affected by their heart-to-heart chat. In every

way it was a remarkable occurrence. I fancy that Queen Victoria reproached herself for not having granted her cousin's request and received Louisa Fairbrother before her marriage, for the queen quickly realised what she had missed. Mrs. Fitzgeorge captured her affection at once and with it her respect, and Her Majesty generously admitted that her cousin George's choice was abundantly justified. All concerned were delighted, but none more so than the queen herself, and once she had acknowledged that she had been a little too severe in the past she determined to atone for her coldness and be a good friend to the morganatic wife.

Foreign visitors, especially Germans, were puzzled by Mrs. Fitzgeorge's position. They saw a lady being treated with royal honours, and then were informed that she had no title or precedence. They beheld the—to them—amazing spectacle of noblemen and noblewomen rising when plain Mrs. Fitzgeorge entered the room; they witnessed the astonishing scene of the greatest statesman in the land listening with the utmost respect to the conversation of an untitled lady whose only claim to distinction in their opinion was the fact that she was beautiful. In the end they gave it up as hopeless, and contented themselves with shrugging their shoulders. Of course, there were certain ill-mannered persons who thought they could treat the duke's wife lightly and these were usually tenth-rate Teutonic princelings and their consorts, who imagined that, as they were poor, they had the right to be very proud. The Duke of Cambridge, who was

said to have been able to out-talk a Cockney cabman, showed them no mercy when they offended him, and on one occasion at least flung a German out of his house because he spoke disrespectfully of Mrs. Fitzgeorge. The Hun was a member of the Mecklenburg-Schwerin family and because the duke had liked his father he invited the young cub to dinner.

The fellow came all moustache and uniform and with characteristic Teuton lack of tact devoted his conversation mainly to a discussion of royal marriages. When he said something that seemed to imply that his host's wife was not really married the easily-exasperated duke caught him by the collar, ran him down the hall, and threw him out of the doorway. A policeman assisted the cad to his feet and helped to brush his clothes. A few days later a formal complaint was laid before the queen, who, however, replied that she made it a rule not to take part in private quarrels. The old Emperor William had the benefit of much plain speaking from the duke, which, let us hope, he passed on to his grandson, the ex-kaiser. William never became reconciled to the morganatic marriage of the Duke of Cambridge, for he had wanted the latter to wed a German wife because he had so many impecunious princesses on his hands that he could not find husbands for half of them.

He accordingly adopted the attitude of a real friend and well-wisher, and affected complete ignorance of the duke's morganatic marriage. In his opinion His Royal Highness was a bachelor who ought to be wedded to a solid, respectable

German woman who would not hesitate to do a little spying on behalf of her kaiser whenever necessary. So he proceeded to drop hints extolling the virtues of his female relations, and the hot-tempered Duke of Cambridge bore it all with remarkable patience until one night at dinner (after a long day in the field during the German Army Manœuvres) the kaiser bluntly invited his guest to marry a princess. The duke instantly replied with a wealth of invective which nearly paralysed the old emperor with astonishment. In the bluntest of language he gave him his opinion of Germans in general and their imitation royalties in particular and he wound up by declaring that no gentleman would ever deliberately advise another to desert a lady to whom he had pledged his word in the sight of God and man. Then he explained that in England it was out of the question for a man to put his wife away, supposing for a moment that he wished to, and he wound up with a comparison between his wife and the type of person the emperor wanted him to marry in which the kaiser heard for the first time a great many home truths.

Five years before Mrs. Fitzgeorge died the ex-kaiser, then Prince William of Prussia, was in London, and as he was generally disliked he was not worried with too many invitations and accordingly had plenty of time to spare. A casual meeting with the Duke of Cambridge in Piccadilly led him to a conventional inquiry after the health of the duke's wife. Mrs. Fitzgeorge was an invalid, who was waiting for the end of her

long life with resignation, happy in the society of her husband and the affection and prosperity of her family.

"If it would gratify her," said William pompously, "I do not mind sparing a little of my time to call on her."

The duke's visage grew purple.

"I am afraid my wife will not be able to spare the time to receive you, Willie," he said curtly. "She is confined to the house and only sees intimate friends. But I will tell her you inquired."

He passed on with a nod, leaving the future kaiser and fugitive gasping. Any other man would have forgotten the incident at once, but William's spiteful nature would not allow him to do that, and four years afterwards, when he was actually German Emperor, he thought he would impress Mrs. Fitzgeorge by dashing up to her house in Queen Street in a State carriage. He meant, of course, to let her see what an emperor was like and to patronise her in his most offensive manner, but unfortunately for his scheme the duke happened to be at home, and William was only two or three minutes in the drawing-room.

"My wife cannot receive you," he said bluntly. "She is not well enough. Allow me to escort you to your carriage." In intimate royal circles there was much clandestine chuckling when the story got abroad that the arrogant Potsdam peace-breaker had been metaphorically "kicked out" of the house in Queen Street.

The duke and his morganatic wife thought alike on most subjects, and after her death there

was no mistaking the fact that His Royal Highness was never the same man again. His marriage, morganatic though it was, proved a complete success, and he never ceased to feel thankful that he had resisted the attempts to make him give up the beautiful girl who had gained his love when he was a boy of twenty. And when he died in 1904 he was buried in her grave. It was his last wish.

CHAPTER XII

THE PRINCE AND THE CAFE-SINGER

THIS story of a prince who lost a throne and found happiness in an unconventional marriage is unique for the reason that the prince fought against his passion for a beautiful girl, believing that for the sake of his country he should marry a king's daughter. For years he tried to find a bride amongst the royal families of Europe, but when disaster overtook him and he became an exile he remembered his humble sweetheart, and was glad to make her his wife and spend the rest of his life happily with her.

Prince Alexander of Battenberg was himself the son of a morganatic marriage, and when he came of age he was merely one of a crowd of minor princelings. Suddenly, however, his destiny was changed by the Czar of Russia, who decreed that he should be the first reigning Prince of Bulgaria, and, accordingly, he stepped into a position which everybody expected would lead to a kingship.

The young man was frankly pleased with his promotion, though his ambition was stronger than his ability. He was sincerely desirous of helping Russia to free Bulgaria from the savage rule of the Turks, and once Alexander was

firmly established on the throne he thought that the best way to achieve this was to enlarge the boundaries of his adopted country by waging warfare against his neighbours, the Serbs, annex their land and population, and thus immeasurably strengthened join issue with the Turks.

It was one of those plans that work out all right on paper but which are difficult to carry into practice. The Serbs, one of the hardiest and bravest of races, would not submit to Alexander, and if he trounced them occasionally they often gained the day, and so the prince instead of adding to his renown lost most of his lustre. One of the quaintest incidents in the two wars with Serbia was the battle in which the opposing reigning princes who commanded their respective armies, ran away in opposite directions, each being under the impression that the other had won! An absurd contretemps from which neither ever recovered.

What with wars and rumours of wars, the necessity for keeping the czar in a good humour and the difficulty of persuading the semi-savage Bulgarians to pay his salary, Prince Alexander had hardly any time for love-making. But he was not fond of the society of the fair sex, for he was gloomy in disposition as well as in appearance. Ever ready to anticipate the worst, the prince was subject to fits of profound despondency and he lacked the most essential attribute of all in a ruler, the will to rule.

It was the czar who first hinted that Alexander should marry into a powerful reigning family, suggesting that, perhaps, Queen Victoria might

not object to Alexander courting one of her relations. The idea recommended itself to the prince, but, alas, for his hopes, Her Majesty would have none of him. She told him politely enough that his position in Bulgaria was too insecure for her to entrust to him the care of one of her grandchildren or great-nieces and Alexander had to bow himself out and look elsewhere. Personally, he was anxious to wed for purely State reasons. Falling in love was out of the question, he thought, and, as if to prove that one should never prophesy unless one knows, within a month he had met a slim little girl with black eyes and a merry tongue who taught him how to love in a few minutes. Adela Loisinger was then a café-singer who sometimes when she was lucky got a small part in a play which was touring provincial Austria or occasionally appeared at a café chantant in Vienna. She had very little talent, and could only hope to attract by her pretty face and saucy tongue. Most men would have regarded her as a somewhat commonplace flirt whose pertness was not without humour, but to Alexander, reigning Prince of Bulgaria, she was a divinity, and he promptly surrendered to her charms.

The first meetings of lovers are always interesting. That of Alexander and Adela took place in a second-rate Vienna café, which the prince had entered with a friend to experience again a pleasure which he had not known for several years. There was the usual concert in progress which bored Alexander until Adela came on in short skirts and began to sing a popular

song of the day. Instantly he sat bolt upright and listened intently, and he was beside himself with delight when the performer having finished came down amongst the audience. It was not long before he was speaking to her, and the girl of the green-room thought he was just an Austrian lieutenant in mufti, and joked and "pulled his leg" and bantered him on his solemn appearance. Alexander took it all in good part and before leaving invited her to come to Sofia to entertain him there.

When he had gone a waiter revealed to her the identity of the man she had been chaffing, and Adela in her surprise could only stare foolishly. She had been attracted by Alexander's geniality and camaraderie, and she felt sorry that he was a real prince because that fact made it almost unlikely that they would ever meet again informally. The thought was saddening, for she knew that he had admired her. She had refused proposals because she wanted to wait for her ideal, and now that she had found him he proved to be a prince and, therefore, beyond her reach.

But Alexander often thought of the little girl with the fascinating eyes and the witty tongue and he sighed when he reminded himself of the necessity of a marriage that would benefit Bulgaria. It was, indeed, essential that he should ally himself with a royal house that could support him in case the Turks started to oppress his people or if the Bulgarians themselves rose against him. The latter was the most probable contingency, and so nervous was he of revolution that he constantly sought advice from Queen

Victoria and from many English statesmen who were then interested in the liberation of the Bulgars.

Yet he never forgot Adela Loisinger. She was constantly before his eyes. That evening in the Viennese café was one of the happiest memories of his life, and he recalled it often to escape from the worries of his position. His Cabinet Ministers were constantly advising him to go on a tour to the courts where eligible princesses were to be found; they brought for his inspection the latest photographs of Royal Highnesses who had immense fortunes and vast political influence to compensate for plainness of feature. Prince Alexander would stare pensively at them and think of the pert little beauty and ask himself why she was not the princess who was to help him to save Bulgaria.

But he was too conscientious a man to follow a will-o'-the-wisp. He realised that he owed his first duty to his people. For their sake he knew that he must wed the daughter or the sister of a king although it would mean unhappiness for himself, but he did not wish to be selfish and he told his Prime Minister that he was at the disposal of his country and would marry for his subjects' welfare and not his own.

A certain German princess's name was mentioned and Alexander meekly agreed to offer her his hand and fortune as soon as he was introduced to her. The promise made all concerned happy, and the Prime Minister gave a fête at his house in honour of the king, and quite unwittingly engaged Mlle. Adela Loisinger, who had come to

Sofia in the capacity of a singer and whose small collection of press cuttings persuaded the locals that she had something of a reputation in provincial Austria.

Prince Alexander hated entertainments of this sort and had it not been that he was afraid to offend the powerful statesman he would have declined the invitation. It was much against his will that he put in an appearance and shook hands with a lot of persons in whom he was uninterested. While he was doing this a sort of café chantant was proceeding in another part of the garden, and as the prince was conversing with the wife of the German Minister in Sofia he heard a fresh young voice singing an old French love song that sent the blood to his cheeks and a thrill through his frame, for he had recognised at once the voice of the girl in the Viennese café, and it suddenly revived his love for her.

Everybody marvelled at the condescension of the prince in chatting so amiably with a mere performer, but the diplomats were delighted when he intimated his wish that the young lady should be presented. They whispered amongst themselves that Prince Alexander was acting brilliantly the part of the really democratic ruler. "The Bulgars will admire him for this," they said; "it ought to be published in all the papers." What would they have said had they known that Alexander was actually in love with the singer and was treasuring every moment spent in her society?

Adela was in brilliant conversational form that afternoon. She had plenty of gossip for the

prince, anecdotes about certain of his relatives picked up in the company of her fellow-actors and actresses and quaint and shrewd comments on the characters and mannerisms of his subjects. It was delightfully unconventional, and he did not mind even when she criticised him. She was such a child of nature, so fresh and innocent and untheatrical that she hypnotised him. And he was sure that she had the finest voice in the world! Before he left he whispered eagerly a request that she might remain in Sofia and see him again.

There was genuine gratitude in the prince's thanks to his Minister for having got up the entertainment in his honour, and that not too far-seeing statesman ascribed the success to the efforts of the highly paid artistes he had engaged from Berlin. Adela Loisinger's name never occurred to him; in fact, she had been a make-weight thrown in to fill up the gaps between the appearances of the really famous performers.

But Alexander was not happy for long. That very night he had a letter from the czar censuring him for certain public utterances. It kept him awake all night, and in the morning he arose nervous and irritable, and with a decided grievance. He wanted to set off at once in search of Adela Loisinger, and then he realised for the first time the disadvantages of the position which had hitherto, despite its trials, seemed to him to be desirable and attractive. Now he knew he was barred from seeing the girl he loved, and so instead of going to her he had to spend the morning discussing plans and projects for an

immediate marriage with a princess while his thoughts and his heart were with the merry little vocalist.

Perhaps it was just as well that his life was so full of incident that he could not find time to hanker after the seemingly unattainable. He had to work on State business eighteen hours a day, and his secret police added a certain spice to his life by revealing with monotonous regularity plots to assassinate him. It was seldom that a week passed without a rumour reaching the palace that a revolution had broken out, and long before one occurred Alexander was quite resigned to the idea of finding himself deprived of his crown at any moment.

But one starless night his luck was in, for then he met Adela quite by chance as he was taking a stroll through the town. A couple of Secret Service agents were dogging his footsteps a hundred paces behind, but they discreetly kept out of sight when they saw the prince raise his cap to a dainty girl and stand chatting with her in the most animated manner. They thought that the two had met by appointment, but so far as Prince Alexander was concerned, it was purely a chance encounter. Adela had, however, remained on in Sofia hoping to see her fairy prince again, and she owed the meeting with him to her regular habit of hovering in the neighbourhood of his dingy and dismal palace. That meeting revealed to both the fact that they were in love. Alexander did not hesitate to admit it, and Adela, overcome by the revelation, could only let him press her hand and stare into his

flushed face. Her own was very white and her gaze was pitious. All the merriment and carelessness had vanished and it did not come back again for years.

The girl knew Sofia better than its reigning prince did. She lived in the cafés half the day and most of the night and she was well aware of the reputation Alexander had amongst his subjects. How often had she heard whispers that betokened a plot to murder him! She recalled them now, and in a shaking voice begged him to return at once to the palace. He laughed at her fears. It was strange that now that they were frankly in love with one another he did most of the laughing. Before that he had generally listened with a solemn face to her quips and jests.

"I often think I am a fool to remain in Bulgaria," he said suddenly. "What will it all lead to? The people are ungrateful, and even if they don't turn me out I shall have to spend my life tied to a grumpy Prussian princess who will make my life a misery because I cannot reproduce in Sofia the gaiety and luxury of Berlin. Ah! Adela, if only I could make you my princess I'd be a happier man and a successful ruler."

"You mustn't think of sacrificing yourself for me," she said in an agitated voice. "I want to see you greater, my dear, dear friend. It will hurt me to part from you, but I shall watch your career with pride, and when you are King of Bulgaria I will shed tears of joy."

She proceeded in this strain for some moments

until she had worked upon his imagination and he was seething with ambition again.

"Yes, yes, you are right, Adela," he said excitedly, retaining her small white hand between his; "but there is no reason why we should be separated for ever. When I am all powerful and independent of both Russia and Turkey I will send for you and make you a countess. You shall be rich and famous."

She laughed at the picture. But at that moment a man's form moved out of the shadows on the opposite side of the road.

"For my sake go back to the palace," she implored him. And seeing that she was really agitated he bent over her hand, pressed his lips on it, and disappeared, leaving her to wander slowly back to her lodgings.

The following afternoon a letter was handed to her, and, although she had never seen the prince's handwriting, she guessed at once from whom it had come. It proved to be a brief note of four lines asking her to be at a certain place that night "to renew our delightful conversation and to make arrangements for the future." There was no word of love in it, yet to the girl who knew the writer it seemed to breathe of nothing else.

Adela was punctual, but after waiting half an hour she returned home in tears for her prince had not kept his appointment, and she was afraid that he had repented and did not wish to see her again. She was wrong, however, for a most dramatic event had happened at the palace, and while Adela was wiping her eyes

and trying to seek relief in sleep Alexander was on his way to Austria, and Bulgaria was without a ruler.

The revolution was short and simple. The prince, who had just partaken of dinner, was reclining in an arm-chair before a window looking out on to the royal gardens when four officers entered and seized him. In the plainest terms they declared that they had come to dethrone and banish him, and they advised him not to make any resistance if he valued his life. They added the startling information that all the soldiers and servants had been disarmed, while the palace and environs were completely in the hands of the revolutionary party.

Alexander was not cast in a heroic mould, and he tamely submitted, expressing himself as only too eager to get away from a position which had caused him so much worry and trouble. With an escort of officers he caught a train to Vienna and not until the good people of Sofia awoke next morning did they know that they had been deprived of their ruler. When they were told they expressed their annoyance. Revolutions, they said, were bad for business, they kept money out of the country, and in their opinion the committee of officers should have shown more consideration for the feelings of a prince who was under the patronage and protection of their liberator, the Czar of Russia. They, therefore, promptly sent a deputation to Alexander requesting him to return, and the prince, who had welcomed his deposition, because it would leave him free to marry Adela Loisinger, hovered

for a few hours between love on one side and ambition on the other. In the end love lost; he set out for Sofia, and for the second time became reigning prince of that country.

Less than a fortnight later he was an exile again, for the czar, disgusted and annoyed with Alexander for not having been more successful, expressed his opinion that the prince was not of the stuff of which monarchs are made. Alexander, alarmed at this, got frightened again, and departed from his capital, never to return. Not many weeks later three Bulgarians were drinking beer in Ronacher's Circus in Vienna when they met a dissolute young cad whose hawklike features and remarkable command of languages impressed them. The fellow introduced himself as Prince Ferdinand, one of the wealthiest men of the day, and thanks to bribery and corruption, he was elected Prince of Bulgaria in succession to Prince Alexander. He is now, of course, the ex-king of that country, which is to-day on the brink of ruin as a result of his policy during the Great European War.

When fate decreed that Alexander should not govern a country he suddenly realised what a fool he had been to bother about such trifles as a crown and a sceptre when they would have prevented him marrying the girl of his heart. Adela Loisinger was worth more to him than the doubtful homage of a race of cut-throats and robbers who were willing to exchange him for the riffraff of a Viennese beer *salon*. Alexander said that he was well out of it, and when he had retired to the country house he owned in Bavaria he sent Adela

notice of his presence there and asked her to make arrangements to join him so that they might be married immediately.

It was an express train that carried Adela to Munich, but to her it was the slowest of slow trains because her fancy travelled as swiftly as the stars. The last time she had seen Alexander he had been a ruling prince; when she walked demurely across the station to take his hand he was a plain count, but already his freedom had effected a remarkable change in his appearance and manner. The old hesitation, nervousness, and self-distrust had gone, and he was a real man at last. Love had changed him for the better, and Adela Loisinger, the humble little singer, brought him the happiness greatness failed to give him.

Although he had fallen from a mighty position and was now a person of small importance a determined attempt was made to prevent him marrying morganatically. Alexander was told that the Bulgarians would quickly get rid of the ruffian who had bribed his way to their throne, and he was advised to hold himself in readiness to resume his old position. It was pointed out that if he married Adela he would lose any chance he possessed of ever becoming a monarch again. The prince derisively rejected the proffered advice. He had no desire for a throne without Adela Loisinger. She was his greatest, his only ambition now.

He requested that all his friends and acquaintances should regard him as a private individual, who wished to be left to mind his own business.

In despair they shrugged their shoulders and went away, and without more ado the prince and the café-singer were married. Of course, in the circumstances it was a very private affair, morganatic marriages usually are, though in any case Prince Alexander would not have invited publicity.

Subsequent events proved that he had not made a mistake. Adela was a devoted and discriminating wife, and with her the prince achieved that happiness which had so long eluded him when he had imagined that it could only be found on a throne.

He was destined, however, not to reach middle age, and when he died in 1893 he was only thirty-six. He left a son and a daughter as well as a broken-hearted widow to mourn his loss; for if Alexander was not a clever man, and had the reputation of being a bit of a fool, the girl who loved him saw no flaws in his character and worshipped him accordingly.

CHAPTER XIII

THE GRAND DUKE AND THE GIRL REVOLUTIONARY

As a young man he was a "hard case" and although the Grand Duke Nicholas Constantine is now nearly seventy he remains as unconventional as ever. If the Bolsheviks had not succeeded in capturing the reins of power he would have been given a high appointment under the Russian Republic, but if he is alive he is living in complete retirement and there are very few persons who remember his exploits forty years ago.

Nicholas was a rebel against his rank. To begin with he strongly objected to the narrow life he was compelled to lead, and he could see no reason why a pretty girl or an intelligent man, no matter how lowly born, should not be admitted on equal terms to the houses of those of kingly birth. His German mother remonstrated and his Russian father threatened, but Nicholas defied them both, and went his own way. He spent money as though it was as common as water and he scandalised his relatives by associating with people who actually worked for their living.

But the Grand Duke overdid it, and when Fanny Lear, an American adventuress from

Philadelphia, captivated him with her beautiful face and entrancing figure Nicholas was prepared to go to any lengths to please her. Fanny was a creature who was never burdened by a heart and she tempted the prince until he actually turned thief for her sake. The beautiful American girl with the pearl-like teeth and the diamond eyes had a natural aptitude for jewellery, and when Nicholas had spent more than his allowance on her she still clamoured for presents. In desperation he purloined his mother's costly collection of jewels, and, thinking that these would not be enough for the greedy adventuress, he added to his booty the sacred gems belonging to the Imperial Chapel. He handed the double haul over to Fanny, who, with characteristic cuteness, thought it would be wise to leave Russia for her health and at once.

The scandal that ensued was terrific. The Grand Duke's mother had a fit when she discovered her loss, and the priest in charge of the Imperial Chapel gloomily predicted the immediate end of the world as a result of the sacrilegious outrage. Suspicion pointed at once to the real criminal, but for the sake of the family it was considered diplomatic to throw the blame on an entirely innocent servant. On hearing this, however, Nicholas came forward and confessed, and a family council was promptly held to decide what was to be done with the young reprobate.

The judgment of this domestic court-martial was that Nicholas should be conveyed in disgrace to a remote part of the Russian Empire

and kept under close supervision there for a number of years. Unbriable detectives, at least they were considered so, were hired to watch him, and every restriction was placed upon him and his personal servants. He was threatened with Siberia if he attempted to escape, and the czar, who was furious with him, declared that he would only be too pleased to be able to visit a much severer punishment upon his rebellious nephew.

For the first few years of Nicholas's exile from the gaieties of court life Russia was fully occupied with foreign and domestic matters, and the delinquent was left practically unnoticed. Occasionally reports of his good conduct reached the czar, who merely expressed grim approval and turned to something else. But as year after year went by, and the Grand Duke was still apparently behaving himself the emperor relented, and decided to pardon and reinstate him. But in the meantime something had happened, for while Russia was making history, the Grand Duke Nicholas Constantine had taken certain steps which were to keep him apart from his family for ever.

The nearest town to the gloomy old castle where he was confined was Tashkent, a deadly place consisting of a few score houses and huts and a population mainly ignorant and debased. Nicholas after a good deal of trouble found only one family worth visiting, that of the postmaster, who was a wizened fellow of fifty of the name of Alkoff. He had a pretty daughter however, Katrina, the pearl of Tashkent. Her pure white

skin, red lips, violet eyes and gentle and intelligent manner made her the belle of the country for miles round. Old Alkoff had had her well educated, and Katrina could talk about the latest schools of thought and discuss with animation literature and art. No wonder the young prince, bored to tears by the life of inaction to which he had been condemned, often sought solace and relief in the society of the pretty post-mistress. But Alkoff was a careful and shrewd man of the world and no fool. He intended to stand no nonsense even from a nephew of the czar's, and at the proper moment he bluntly asked Nicholas to remember that when he was his guest he must conduct himself just as a friend and not as a well-born aristocrat patronising a working-class family.

Of course, Nicholas could not meet Katrina every day without falling in love with her. She was meant to be loved, and the girl, who was as clever as she was beautiful, needed none of the arts of the coquette to turn the head of the Grand Duke. There was something about her that fascinated him. She was everything that was sweet and girlish, and yet at times he detected certain determination and obstinacy in her character which was quite at variance with her youth and looks. The village folk respected her, too, and she appeared to be consulted even by the aged when they were in trouble. When the Grand Duke tried to solve the mystery of her influence he was only more mystified still, and it piqued him to find himself an outsider in this respect, for it was evident that there was

at least one secret in the Alkoff family which he had not been allowed to share.

Nevertheless, he decided to ask Katrina to marry him. He knew that the two wealthiest and in every way most eligible young men in the place were after her, and in ordinary circumstances either would have been a good catch, but Katrina sent the prince into the seventh heaven of delight when she refused both of them. The same day he proposed to her, and, to his joy, was not repulsed.

The girl listened gravely to his proposal, and if she did not say "Yes" there was no sign of a refusal in her eloquent eyes. Nicholas knew then that she was in love with him and that he would not lose her, but when he stretched out his arms to clasp her she drew back.

"Not yet, Nicholas," she said, in a whisper, and her brow clouded. "I want you and me to talk about it with father. There is something that may make you resolve never to see me again."

"Nothing in the world could do that," he answered. "I couldn't exist without you, Katrina, and for your sake I will gladly surrender my rank and riches and work like a labourer to make you happy."

"It isn't a question of rank," she said quietly, "or riches either. I know it would have to be a morganatic marriage. That doesn't frighten me, but you don't know everything about us, Nicholas, and you ought to be told all before you think of marrying me."

That night the Grand Duke stopped to supper,

and when the table was cleared away and silence had settled down upon the village old Alkoff drew his chair up to the table whilst Katrina went to the door to make sure there were no eavesdroppers. Madame Alkoff sat in a chair in the corner and never spoke throughout the proceedings.

Alkoff leant across the table and stared into Nicholas's pale face.

"You wish to marry our Katrina?" he asked suddenly.

"With all my heart and soul," the Prince exclaimed, and no one could doubt his sincerity. Katrina cast a look of mingled gratitude and affection towards him, but remained silent.

"Then even if you do not marry her you will respect our secret?" continued the postmaster. "You will not betray us?"

The Grand Duke would have protested against the imputation but Alkoff insisted upon a plain answer, and it was given with emphasis.

"Very well, then," continued Alkoff, dropping his suspicious, hesitating manner, "you can be trusted, I see. My daughter and I and her mother are the principals of the Nihilist Club in Tashkent. Yes, we are Nihilists and Revolutionaries, sworn to destroy the Romanoffs and end for ever the tyranny under which Russia is groaning."

The young prince sprang to his feet in astonishment, for all of a sudden he realised what it was that had hitherto been kept from him. Pretty, sweet-faced Katrina a Nihilist! Was it credible? The answer was his own recollection of the girl's

extraordinary influence in the district. Doubtless those persons who had called to consult her were members of the Nihilist organisation of which Katrina was a chief. Old Alkoff might have been anything. He looked a fanatic and a revolutionary, yet he derived his income from the State. And as for Madame Alkoff. He could have laughed at the idea that the podgy, good-natured dame with the gentle manners and benevolent disposition was a member of a society that believed in dynamite and assassination.

"I still wish to marry Katrina," he said slowly, while his eyes lighted up. "And if I am found worthy I would like to become a Nihilist too, and help to work for the liberty of the people."

Even the girl who loved him was astounded by his request, and for a fraction of a second she was torn by doubts. A Grand Duke amongst the Nihilists! It was absolutely impossible! There was something too comic about it! Nicholas's whole existence was bound up with the well-being and prosperity of the throne. For centuries the Romanoffs had been robbing the people to enrich themselves, and if the democracy triumphed the first thing they would do would be to deprive the thieves of their spoils and punish them.

Old Alkoff, a good judge of character, surveyed him steadily.

"We badly need recruits, especially men who can help the cause," he said, and, to Katrina's amazement, she realised that her father believed

in Nicholas's good faith, "but you must first go through a period of probation."

"And Katrina—when can I marry her?" said the prince eagerly.

"That she will decide for herself," said the postmaster. "Katrina knows her own mind, and she is free to do what she pleases."

"Let us be married at once then," Nicholas said quickly, "and then I will prove my sincerity, for I love and adore you, and I will battle for you against my own class. I give you my word of honour, I will."

So the banished Grand Duke and the postmaster's daughter were secretly married, and after the ceremony Nicholas was initiated into all the mysteries of Nihilism and took the oath to work for the Russian Revolution. I wonder if he ever thought he would live to see the people triumphant in Russia, and if he ever recalls now the day when he became the husband of the lovely girl who proved such a splendid wife. For his part he faithfully kept his promise, never betraying the Nihilists, and remaining a member of the organisation for several years.

It was a curious and awkward coincidence that just when Nicholas and Katrina were married the czar should become anxious to see his nephew again, and it was actually owing to the Alkoffs that the emperor suddenly felt well disposed towards the Grand Duke, because it was their influence that had changed him from a harum-scarum and reckless young spendthrift into a decent member of society. When the czar's agents reported that Nicholas was a model young

man and was never heard to utter disloyal or disrespectful sentiments concerning his relatives. His Majesty resolved that he should not only be restored to rank and liberty but—and this was to be a special act of favour—he (the emperor) would select a beautiful princess to be the bride of his reformed nephew!

The programme was intended to fill Nicholas with joy, and perhaps it would have done so had it not been for the fact that the young man had already found happiness in the daughter of the postmaster, and really wished to be left in "exile" for the rest of his life. He had settled down to the tepid joys of Tashkent, and there was nothing he liked better. Katrina and he were perfectly happy, and he was beginning to find a curious fascination in studying the philosophy of the Nihilists, indeed, it was not very long before he was heart and soul a revolutionary.

And then one morning a letter came from Petrograd announcing that the emperor was sending a special envoy with a message to his scapegrace nephew. Nicholas instantly wished the envoy at the bottom of the sea, but he had to prepare for his arrival, and he remained in the castle all the morning issuing directions, desperately anxious to get back to Katrina, who, as he knew, was expecting him every moment.

The Imperial messenger not appearing at the appointed time, the Grand Duke went down to the postmaster's house very pleased to think that the emperor had changed his mind and did not

intend to bother him, but by a strange mischance an hour after Nicholas's departure the envoy arrived. He was a Russian general and he demanded an audience with the Grand Duke, and when informed of his absence insisted that he should be conducted to whatever place he was so that he might present His Majesty's mandate.

There was no help for it and one of the Grand Duke's servants took the gorgeously uniformed general to the village and led him into the post-master's shop. At that moment Nicholas was in the room at the back with Katrina, who was busy with her domestic work. Of course, it was pretty well understood in the neighbourhood that the prince and the girl were very close friends, but save for the members of the inner council of the Nihilists' Club nobody knew that they were legally man and wife.

The czar's representative brushed past the servant and entered the room like a horse at the gallop. Then recognising Nicholas he bowed to the earth, and with expressions of profound respect handed him an autograph letter from his uncle, the Emperor of Russia.

Nicholas broke the seal and read the message, and his expression became troubled when he realised that he was to be pardoned so that he might be married to a German princess whom he had never seen. Involuntarily he turned to Katrina and handed her the letter. She glanced at it carelessly, and even laughed at the script which the old general regarded as sacred.

"You had better tell him the truth, Nicholas,"

she said calmly. "It is useless trying to keep our secret any longer."

"Before we go any further, general," the Grand Duke said, with a slight bow. "Allow me to present you to my wife."

The czar's deputy gasped and stared, and only with difficulty stammered out a greeting to the smiling and self-possessed girl. He was well aware of the contents of the emperor's missive, for he had been appointed member of a deputation which was to have visited Berlin to obtain the German Emperor's sanction to the engagement of one of his relatives with the Grand Duke Nicholas Constantine of Russia.

"Madame is charming," he said, when he had recovered his self-control, "but I am afraid that His Majesty will be disappointed. Our beloved emperor had expected that——"

"It is useless talking, general," said Nicholas, who was not in the mood for argument. "Just go back to my uncle and tell him what you know. I am a married man, and I am very happy. I have no wish to take part in affairs of State. All I ask is to be left alone."

When the sensational news was known in Petrograd the emperor set his secret service agents to work. They invaded Tashkent and by every questionable means discovered everything about the Grand Duke. They learnt that he was a Nihilist and they prepared to destroy the local organisation. But Nicholas was able to warn his fellow-plotters in time and when the Russian secret police raided the building where the weekly meetings of the Club were held they

found it empty, nor could they obtain proof against any member except Nicholas, and they dare not arrest him.

The prince's morganatic marriage and membership of a Society which was pledged to dethrone the czar were too grave to be overlooked, and His Majesty ordered his nephew to be kept in close detention for the remainder of his life. A special house was assigned him in Tashkent and sentries were placed around it, and whenever he went for a walk—he was allowed a five-mile radius—he was followed by an armed soldier, who had orders to shoot him should he make any suspicious movement.

Katrina, the beautiful Nihilist, shared her husband's imprisonment, and, thanks to her, it never became irksome. Her society more than compensated for the loss of the doubtful pleasures of the great world outside, and her love and gentleness reconciled him to his lot. The czar tried, of course, to part them, but on this point Nicholas was firm, and even the fact that she was a Nihilist had to be forgotten by his political foes. The Grand Duke's relatives declared that he would grow tired of her, and they advised the czar to leave them alone and see what would happen. The prince, however, is still with her according to the latest reports, and Katrina, although verging on old age, remains beautiful. A few years ago it was rumoured that she had died, but there was no confirmation of the statement, which emanated from Berlin. Nicholas never sought a foreign princess in marriage, and until the revolution he was the benevolent despot of Tash-

kent, the father of the place, and the man whose advice was always sought and taken.

In 1893 a determined attempt was made to murder them both, but Nicholas shot down the two would-be assassins, who confessed with their dying breath that they were Russian police and that they had been ordered by their superior to murder Nicholas and Katrina.

CHAPTER XIV

THE PRINCE AND THE PEASANT MAID

CHARLES and Herman were the sons of the reigning Prince of Hohenlohe-Langenberg, a wealthy Hun who had acquired an enormous fortune by the simple process of robbing the people he ruled. The two boys were opposites in character—Charles, the elder, good-natured and easy-going; Herman, crafty, jealous, and ever petulant because he was not his father's heir. He resented being only the younger son, and from his earliest days he quarrelled with Charles because of this. But the time was to come when for the sake of a lowly-born maid the elder was to surrender everything to the younger, content to dwell in obscurity so that he might marry the girl of his choice.

Prince Charles was thirty when one day he saw in a forest a pretty girl dressed in peasant costume. She was standing by a gate leading to a cottage, and the prince was struck at once by her beauty. Pretending that he was thirsty he rode up and asked her for a cup of water. She recognised him at once, and because he was the son of a rapacious ruler this girl of the people did not grant his request with any enthusiasm. However, she could not but admire the graceful

figure of the young prince nor resist his deference or courteous manner. Before she quite knew how it had happened she was chatting animatedly with him and telling the prince all about herself. He learnt that her name was Clara Braun and that her father earned a precarious livelihood as a gamekeeper.

Clara was of medium height, with brown hair and eyes, a lithe figure, and a freshness and innocence that was as charming as the forest and the river that ran through it. She had received very little education, yet there was nothing harsh in her voice nor crude in her manners. She was just a child of nature, unspoilt by luxury, and delightfully grateful for the very few pleasures that came her way.

The prince rode homewards in a thoughtful frame of mind. For over five years his father had been urging him to marry, and he was aware that the only person who was pleased by his bachelorhood was Herman, whose chances of succeeding were daily being increased thereby. His younger brother was, indeed, hungry for power. He was very ambitious and it was obvious that if the principality came into his possession he would practise upon it all the arts of the petty tyrant. Because he coveted it he sided with his elder brother's disinclination to marry into a great family and in secret he encouraged him to wait until he had met a princess who appealed to him, for even Herman did not dream that Charles was to marry morganatically and cut himself off from the succession.

Had it not been for the careful watch Herman was keeping on him Charles would have managed to meet Clara in the forest without anybody being the wiser. After the first encounter he did not rest until he had seen her a second time, and the gamekeeper's daughter, to her own surprise, experienced a thrill of delight when she saw him coming towards her. Not that she thought of love then. It was altogether out of the question. In those days the elder son of a reigning prince was treated as though he was divine. There had been a few morganatic marriages, but Clara had never heard of them; if she had she would not have known what they meant. But with each stolen interview with the prince she became more enamoured of him, and she gradually began to realise that on the day he left her for ever the sun would shine no more for her.

It was a pleasant courtship because neither would admit that love had anything to do with it. They pretended to be just friends, and the child of the forest spoke of her small ambitions whilst Prince Charles wondered if it would be possible for him to make this wild beauty his wife. He had not the courage to take his father into his confidence. The reigning prince was, as a matter of fact, dying, and Charles felt that it would not be kind to startle and, perhaps, hasten his end by introducing the subject of his marriage to the gamekeeper's daughter. But by now his secret was known to his younger brother, who had followed him one day to the trysting-place and had listened gleefully to the conversation between the prince and the peasant-maid.

Herman was, indeed, overjoyed. He knew that his brother was not a cad, and that he would wed Clara Braun once he made up his mind that he really loved her. Charles's nature was quiet and studious and he had never shown any capacity for government, and Herman realised that if his elder brother married morganatically he would be the next reigning prince.

One evening Herman walked boldly up to the cottage and disguised as an ordinary traveller asked for supper. He was, of course, hospitably entertained. Clara herself waited on him, and, as she moved about the room humming gaily to herself, he watched her narrowly. It was evident that she was in love, and the prince, a sour-hearted product of a rascally Court, was himself fascinated by her. Before he left he had actually fallen in love with Clara himself. The knowledge exasperated him, he could not deny that. The gamekeeper's daughter had turned his head, a fact which would have struck her as extraordinary had she been conscious of it because she had taken an instant dislike to him.

During the long walk back to his father's house the prince wrestled with the problem that had so unexpectedly come into his life. He knew that very soon his brother would be the reigning prince, with a large annual income at his disposal and, what was worse in his opinion, would have the respect and affection of the people—and Herman was aware that he was just as unpopular as Charles was beloved.

Fortune favoured Herman for a time. His father's illness having taken a turn for the worse,

it was necessary that the heir should be in attendance at the palace day and night. Greatly to his distress, therefore, Charles could not get to the trysting-place in the forest, and Herman, although bitter because he was too unimportant to be consulted by his father's advisers, gladly wandered into the forest to waylay Clara. When she recognised him he swore that Charles had sent him with a special message, and Clara was so pleased to hear this she immediately did all she could to overcome her dislike and be charming to him.

It was an odd and a dangerous situation. All three were living on a mine that might explode at any moment, but only Herman was aware of the danger. Every night he received the doctor's report of his father's condition, and every afternoon he would meet Clara and as she prattled he asked himself how he could steal both girl and principality. Charles was still unable to leave the palace. His dying father kept him there, but had he known Herman's intentions nothing would have prevented him riding at once to the cottage and warning the girl.

Realising that she would do anything provided she thought she was pleasing his elder brother, Herman resolved to take advantage of this blind devotion to make her clope with him. Clara was, of course, fully aware why she had not seen her lover for some days. Everybody was talking about the illness of the reigning Prince of Hohenlohe-Langenberg, and all were getting ready to welcome Prince Charles to the seat of power. Herman had often invented

messages from his brother for the benefit of Clara, who had blushed and smiled through her tears and had asked him to repeat them. That had sickened Herman, but he was a master-hypocrite, and now he knew that her weakness would be to his advantage.

That morning he had been informed that his father was nearing the end, a fact which would make it impossible for Charles to leave his bedside. Herman, therefore, met Clara earlier and told her that at six o'clock that night she was to go to a certain spot well cloaked and step into a carriage which would take her to the house of a priest where Prince Charles, disguised by a hood and long cloak, would be waiting for her. Then they would be secretly married and nobody could ever separate them.

The romantic wedding appealed to Clara, who was all unconviction herself, and she promised to obey her lover's instructions to the letter. With tears in her eyes she thanked Herman for all his kindness to her, pathetically asking him for his friendship in the future, for she knew that when she had to live in a palace she would find her path strewn with difficulties. Herman promised, and when he had left her he paused and burst into a peal of laughter, for he was going to impersonate his brother, and he hoped within a few hours to be the legal husband to Clara Braun.

But in the meantime something had happened at the palace, and that was a sudden renewal of the old prince's strength. Greatly to the surprise of the doctors he snatched himself from

the jaws of death, and when, an hour or so later, he was sleeping peacefully they were in a position to inform Prince Charles that his father would recover.

It was the best news he had heard for years, and the prince, freed at last from confinement to the palace, rushed to the stables, saddled his own horse and started off for the cottage in the forest. When he turned off the high road and was amongst the trees he began to sing, careless and indifferent to danger although it was nearly dusk and the forest seemed full of shadows and spirits. He dismounted a hundred yards from the cottage and walked to the old tree near which he was certain to find Clara, unless she had gone off for the day to help her father. To his surprise there was a certain unnatural calm about the cottage that caused him to run at once to the door and knock. There was no response, and when he had knocked a dozen times he began a systematic search which ended in his getting through a window and finding on the kitchen mantelpiece a note in Clara's straggling hand informing her father that she had gone to marry Prince Charles and that he need not worry about her.

For several precious seconds the prince stood with the letter in his hand, unable to make head or tail of it. "Going to marry Prince Charles that night!" What did it mean? Surely there was no other prince bearing his name who had wooed and won the beauty of the Forest!

Not a suspicion of his brother entered his mind

and when he recovered from his amazement and saw that something must be done immediately he rushed back to the horse, mounted it, and rode recklessly through the wood.

Once again, however, chance favoured him, for as he turned out of a lane formed by a double row of old elm trees he saw a shadowy figure ahead of him which he recognised. The next moment he had flung himself off his animal and, calling the name of his beloved, was running towards her with outstretched arms.

And less than a couple of hundred yards away two confidential servants of Prince Herman were waiting with a carriage to convey Clara Braun to their master!

It did not take long for the prince to understand the situation, for as Clara innocently told how good Herman had been to her and what a comfort his companionship had been during the separation from him he guessed the truth. When she went on to ask puzzled questions about that night's marriage ceremony at the house of a priest Charles parried them whilst he evolved an evasive answer, for he did not wish to frighten the girl by revealing the nature of the plot to ruin her. He eventually gave his father's illness as an excuse for postponing the marriage, and Clara, who only wanted him to be happy, declared that she would wait for him as long as he wished. She was very lucky, she added, to have gained not only his love but the friendship and protection of his brother. Charles smiled grimly in the gloom of the forest but did not contradict her, but he trembled as he

thought of what might have happened had he not found her letter to her father in time.

The gamekeeper was in the cottage when Charles said good night to the girl amid the trees, but for over two hours he waited and kept guard after she had gone indoors. Then convinced that Herman would not appear that night he turned homewards with fury in his heart against the brother who had attempted so basely to betray him.

There was only one person awake in the palace when at two o'clock in the morning Prince Herman came in weary and irritable and muttering curses against the girl he considered had deceived him; but when he was confronted by Prince Charles he realised at once that his plot had been discovered. Charles did not mince his words, and for the first and only time in his life he made his younger brother feel the full force of his tongue. In an upper room they faced one another, Charles, ennobled by his wrath, Herman, sullen and threatening. For once the elder brother was in the ascendant, and after scornfully describing Herman's conduct he wound up by threatening to shoot him should he ever attempt again to do Clara an injury.

When he had finished, however, Herman had something to say. He reminded Charles that no reigning prince of the family could have a wife who had sprung from the people.

"If you marry Clara you cannot succeed our father," said Herman, with a scowl. "You will be turned out of the principality and every prince's hand in Germany will be against you.

Are you prepared to make that sacrifice for a gamekeeper's daughter?"

"I am, and willingly," cried Charles, with enthusiasm. "Clara is more to me than a dozen principalities. If I have to choose between her and succeeding to the head of our family I will choose her."

"Then do so," said Herman triumphantly, "for I will inform our father that you have promised to marry his gamekeeper's daughter, and he will disinherit you at once."

The threat hardly affected Charles at all. He had prepared long ago to face the storm that the announcement of his engagement would produce, and the sacrifice would be easy enough to one who had never valued the privileges or responsibilities of his position. Yet he disliked the idea of benefiting Herman, whom he now detested, but there was no help for it, and he realised that for Clara's sake as well as his own he must strike a bargain with his younger brother.

It had been Charles's intention to leave Herman the moment he had finished his biting criticism of his conduct, but the royal servants were astir before the conference between the brothers ended. By then they had decided not only Clara Braun's future but the fate of the principality, for in return for his support Charles agreed to stand aside in favour of his younger brother, who guaranteed the payment of an annual sum which would enable Charles to keep his wife and bring up properly any children of their union. Herman also promised to stand

by his brother if there was attempt to prevent the morganatic marriage taking place.

It was the only subject upon which they agreed, and, as it was in Herman's interest to keep his side of the bargain, he certainly was not wanting when the chief advisers of the reigning prince tried their hardest to persuade Prince Charles to give up the gamekeeper's daughter. They even sought the aid of the King of Prussia, and a host of relatives came to the palace to argue with the stubborn young man. However, all their efforts were in vain. Charles would "not listen to reason," as they put it. He was too much in love with the girl of the forest to hesitate to sacrifice a splendid heritage for her. His father shed tears and declaimed about the immense fortune he would lose by his stupidity, but the prince was adamant.

The hardest battle of all was the deputation of citizens who privately implored him to save them from his brother Herman. It was very difficult, indeed, to have to disappoint them, but he had to remember that he had pledged his word to Clara, and that without her he would never experience any happiness. The deputation went away sorrowful, yet they admired the spirit of the prince who placed love before power.

All opposition had been overcome and preparations for the marriage were well in hand, when the reigning Prince of Hohenlohe-Langenberg suddenly died and Herman succeeded to his place. Owing to mourning the wedding had to be postponed, but while his enemies tried to

take advantage of the delay to part the lovers Charles was not idle, and the day before she became his wife Clara was created Countess von Bronn, a large sum was settled upon her and it was arranged that all her children should be counts and countesses and bear the name of "Von Bronn."

There can be no doubt that if Prince Herman had been more popular with his people he would have declined to carry out his promise, but, as he knew that a refusal would cause Charles to claim his rights, when he would be backed by everybody in the principality, he took considerable part in the morganatic marriage of his brother. Clara had never been told of his treacherous behaviour towards her and she was touchingly grateful for his kindness now. The sanction of the reigning prince made matters smoother, of course, and there was a full and proper legal ceremony. Within a space of twenty-four hours the gamekeeper's daughter became a countess and the wife of a prince and began a married life which was to extend over many years and scarcely ever know a day's unhappiness.

Prince Charles had good cause to be glad he had married for love and had sacrificed the principality, for with the growth of Prussian power it was much harassed by the kaiser, and each year witnessed an encroachment on its dignity which nearly drove Prince Herman crazy. He was powerless, however, and had to feign contentment. In startling contrast to Charles's success was his younger brother's

experience of matrimony. He married a princess, and the ceremony did not lack for splendour, but there was never any romance about it, and when he died in 1913—six years after Charles—he left behind him the memory of a proud and disappointed man, whose ambition had never been really satisfied and who expressed regret just before his death that he had ever succeeded in displacing his brother.

CHAPTER XV

AN AMERICAN PRINCESS

THE kaiser was not six years old when a pretty American girl startled Prussian Society by carrying off one of the greatest matrimonial prizes of the day, Prince Frederick of Schleswig-Holstein. At the time the marriage scarcely interested him, but later on that same girl played an important part in his own life and helped to shape the destinies of Germany, for Wilhelm subsequently married her niece and thus came within the sphere of influence of a very remarkable personality.

The daughters of Uncle Sam are noted for their good looks, strong common sense, and amusing unconventionality. Coming as they do from a land which knows no monarchs or titles of nobility they are apt when living in Europe to pay small attentions to these artificial distinctions. And Mary Lee, the daughter of David Lee, merchant of New York, was no exception to the rule. She burst upon Berlin society in the early sixties and took it by storm. The staid and beefy Prussians had grown accustomed to solid womenfolk who meekly obeyed their lords and masters and who were content to bear children and look after their homes.

To them Mary Lee, bright, beautiful, vivacious, and witty, was a revelation. They fell in love with her accent, while her early efforts to speak German were a perpetual joy. The way she talked to the highest in the land struck them as something wonderful, and wherever she went she was not soon forgotten.

It was through the portal of the American Embassy in Berlin that the daughter of the New York merchant entered Prussian society. She had therefore the best credentials, which she speedily confirmed by gaining an immediate popularity. Everyone admitted that she was an ornament to a society which hitherto had not been particularly exhilarating, and Mary Lee with the pert tongue and dazzling complexion scored a series of triumphs. There could be no doubt of the fact that, apart from her fortune, she was worth wooing for her own sake, and within a couple of months of her introduction to Berlin society she had a dozen men courting her. They were rich and poor, good-looking and the reverse, some shady adventurers; others genuinely in love with her. But they all flocked around Mary Lee, and whenever the opportunity came proposed in guttural English or tempted fate in eloquent German. To all of them, however, Mary had but one answer, accompanied by a laughing glance from her eloquent eyes, and followed by a few tactful words she managed to retain their friendship despite her refusal.

The girl declined for the sufficient reason that she had not been attracted by any man yet. It did not matter to her that she had refused

magnates who ranked next to the royal family. Mary Lee, being a democrat, thought more of the man than of his position, and she was not at all tempted to change her condition until a casual meeting with a certain prince made her suddenly realise that Fate had destined her after all to be the wife of a German.

Prince Frederick of Schleswig-Holstein was a delicate young man with refined manners and a retiring disposition. He was thoughtful and studious, and he had nothing in common with the average German. Horseplay he abhorred, and he disliked duelling. But what most appealed to the Yankee girl was his innate courtesy to women. She had, of course, seen for herself how badly Germans, high and low, treat their womenfolk, and she had guessed that her money and her beauty were the only reasons for the exaggerated and unnatural, because forced, politeness of the Prussians she met in society. Without them she knew that she would have experienced the insolent contempt with which the officer-class endeavour to prove that they are the salt of the earth.

The prince, therefore, was doubly welcome to her, and Mary Lee, who had been warned that a marriage between social unequals was out of the question in Germany, began to nurse secret ambitions. She admired Prince Frederick from the first, and ever afterwards she had no thought for any other man. She accepted only invitations that brought her into contact with him, and when he was travelling abroad she led a secluded life, for once she knew Prince Frederick

everybody else became of very small interest to her.

On his part the prince had not been unaffected by the charm and beauty of the unconventional American girl. It was once more the story of the young man jaded by the ordinary pleasures of society finding a new joy in the discovery of a vivid personality. For Mary Lee was a startling contrast to the Prussian princesses who were deemed eligible brides for him. It required considerable courage, however, to contract a morganatic marriage. There had not been many instances, and the powers of kings were much greater than they are now. Besides, left-handed marriages were not regarded with favour even by the people themselves, because they looked upon them as unnatural and an outrage upon a ceremony which one great Church at least regards as the holiest of sacraments after the Communion.

But once Prince Frederick had grown to love Mary Lee it seemed very easy to him to make concessions so that he might marry her. When he informed his relatives they were, of course, annoyed, and did all in their power to prevent him "committing an act of folly." It was characteristic of the whole brood that after one of them had tackled Mary Lee upon the subject and had been routed they should avoid her like the plague. The Yankee girl's tongue was too clever and quick for them; she was a mistress in the art of repartee, and her common-sense arguments were too much for their out-of-date lectures about the sacredness of royalty and the

necessity for the preservation of the princely caste. Mary Lee simply told them that she would be a far better wife to the prince than any of his stolid and unimaginative relatives could be, and that if only the other members of the royal families of Europe took their brides from the healthy middle classes they would benefit enormously. These terribly anarchistic remarks were duly reported to the old emperor, who shed tears and invoked the aid of the Almighty to save him and his family from the designs of persons like this clever, healthy, and wise girl from New York. It was a ridiculous attitude for the Prussian king to take, but a German Republic was not even thought of then and the Hohenzollerns simply regarded Holland as another world to conquer and not as a place of exile.

Mary Lee and Prince Frederick were married, and those who only knew her late in life can have no idea of the beautiful bride she made as she stood beside her handsome lover in the Protestant Church and proudly took him to be her husband. She was perfectly happy. It did not worry her that the prince had been compelled to drop his royal rank and had agreed to call himself Prince von Noer. She could not see any difference between Princess Frederick and Princess von Noer.

"Anyhow, I'm a princess no matter how you look at it," she said, with a laugh when someone condoled with her.

Her happiness, however, was destined to be short, for within seven months she was a widow.

Prince Frederick, never very strong, had been growing steadily worse up to the date of his wedding. His doctors had dosed him with false hopes of ultimate recovery, and while Mary Lee knew that he was very ill she believed that with careful nursing and attention she could save him. But he was too far gone to recover. They had been married on the last day of a cheerless and cold November, and, although the prince struggled bravely through the winter, he was a dead man on the second day of the following July.

During her brief space of married life Mary Lee had gained the goodwill of most of her husband's relations and they deeply and sincerely sympathised with her in her great sorrow. Prince Christian, her brother-in-law, who later became the husband of Prince Helena of Great Britain, Queen Victoria's daughter, was particularly assiduous in his attentions to her, and he did all he could to soften the blow which for a time threatened to kill her. It was the late Prince Christian who persuaded the Emperor William I to send a letter of condolence to the girl from whom he had once prayed to be protected, and this kindly act was deeply appreciated by her. It was something for her to know that it was widely recognised that she had proved herself to be fit in every way to be the wife of a prince who was a really good man. Had it not been for the kindness of all her friends and acquaintances David Lee's daughter would have returned to the States. Berlin society did not fascinate her. As an unmarried girl she had

enjoyed the novelty of it, but now that she was a widow who took little interest in general affairs her thoughts turned towards the land of her birth. The American papers had, of course, made much of her royal marriage, which was up to then the greatest match a Yankee girl had achieved, and it was a common saying in the States that if "Mary Lee was given half a chance she would turn her Prince into a King." That indicates the type of person she was, and certainly she had ambitions enough for half a dozen ordinary people.

However, as we have seen, death stepped in, and the girl who had planted her feet on the steps of a throne found herself a lonely widow. Her husband's sudden end had proved a tragic blow to her and she felt that her grief would never be assuaged until she had left far behind her the scenes and places which were hallowed and endeared to her because they were associated with him.

It was the letter of condolence from the king that caused her to hesitate. She saw at once that it was sufficient to give her an unassailable position in Berlin, for she had been afraid that as the widow of a man she had married morganatically she would be treated with that boorishness which is common enough in Germany. But now that she had been "taken up" by the head of the royal family she would be all right, and so Mary Lee, Princess von Noer, changed her plans. She took a house in Berlin, remained secluded for a couple of years, and then once more launched out into society. This time she

was the Princess von Noer, and everybody knew that she had the entrée to the Berlin Schloss and that her husband's powerful brother, Prince Christian, now the son-in-law of Queen Victoria, was her best friend.

Nine years after the death of Prince Frederick his widow married General von Waldersee, a count and a courtier who was intimate with the then Crown Prince of Prussia, the husband of Queen Victoria's eldest daughter. It was considered a very lucky match for the American girl, but, whatever her own opinion was, she kept it to herself. For Mary Lee was slowly developing her plans. Her ambition grew greater every day. She aspired to become a power at court, and she had the cleverness not to be in a hurry. General von Waldersee suited her purposes admirably. As his wife she could go everywhere and meet the most important men and women of the time, and that was all she wanted, for she knew that she could do the rest.

By now the Franco-Prussian War had made Germany an Empire, the King of Prussia an emperor, and the Germans the second greatest power in Europe. A new era of prosperity had begun for them. Great Britain was entirely well disposed towards the young empire and had its rulers only walked the paths of peace the world would not have experienced the recent terrible calamity. Mary Lee, who styled herself Countess von Waldersee, meant to have a finger in the national pie. She was certain that she could benefit the country of her adoption if only she were allowed to take part in

its councils, even if she had to keep behind the scenes.

Since her morganatic adventure, her first husband's family had been increasing in importance. Prince Christian's marriage had undeniably raised its status, and there was something like a rush to inter-marry with it. The young Prince William of Prussia, so soon to become kaiser, had numerous love affairs before he proposed to the fair young beauty who was, amongst other things, the niece of Mary Lee, of New York. It was Bismarck who persuaded Prince William to ask her hand in marriage, and the prince obeyed greatly to the delight of the empress's family, but their pleasure was as nothing to that of the Countess von Waldersee, who was devoted to the young princess who was under her influence. She knew that when her niece shared the throne she would send for her aunt, forgetting that she was the daughter of an American merchant and only remembering that she had once been the wife of her favourite uncle.

Her programme, however, was marked by one important omission,—she made no allowance for the silly pride and vanity of the prince who became her nephew by marriage, and when he was kaiser and his wife timidly drew attention to the fact that the Countess von Waldersee was her aunt he snorted out an order that she was not to be invited to the Schloss.

“I refuse to recognise this American woman,” he said haughtily, “and so must you, Dona. She married your uncle morganatically, which

I consider no marriage at all. Just think of the scandal her presence here would cause. She is the daughter of a Yankee merchant. I am the German Emperor—you are my wife and we have no room for tradesmen's daughters."

Mary Lee, therefore, was not asked to the receptions and dinners that followed the kaiser's accession, but while intensely disappointed she did not despair. She knew that sooner or later she must meet His Majesty in society, and that she would make him feel interested in her.

The desired meeting came about at the house of Prince Hohenlohe, who was on particularly friendly terms with Count von Waldersee. The kaiser, dropping in for an informal luncheon one day, found himself seated next to the general's wife, and as he was in one of his expansive moods he greeted her genially, and entered into conversation. It was the opportunity she had longed for, and well aware that she was the cleverest person in that room she laid herself out to impress Wilhelm II. He had, of course, met her before when he was thought to be a long way off the throne, but not until this occasion did he realise how quick-witted, shrewd, and courageous she was. She summed up her acquaintances in a few words that lacked neither strength nor wisdom, and the kaiser went home to the Berlin Schloss convinced that she was the most remarkable woman he had ever known. But he said nothing about her to the kaiserin. He was too small-minded to confess that he had made a mistake, and it was not until he found himself in a difficulty that he invited the woman who had once

been the morganatic wife of his wife's uncle to come and see him at the palace.

The hour named was an unusual one, and the countess, guessing that she was to be consulted on some vital subject, gladly obeyed. She found the kaiser and kaiserin alone, and after the usual civilities the latter took her leave, and Mary Lee was left with the Emperor, who was obviously greatly disturbed by something he had on his mind.

With much stammering and many excuses he eventually asked her to help him to defeat the machinations of a certain Bavarian beauty, with whom he had been on very intimate terms before his accession. This woman was in Berlin and was threatening to publish letters which she declared the emperor had written her when they were lovers. Wilhelm swore that the letters were barefaced forgeries, but, nevertheless, he was anxious to have them destroyed.

"Like Cæsar's wife," he said pompously, "I must be above suspicion. I will have no scandals in my dominions, and I have to set an example to my subjects." He talked a lot in this style, but what it all really amounted to was that he wished to be saved from suffering for his sins and that he had called in Mary Lee's help because the task required cleverness, discretion, and diplomacy, all of which he and his countrymen lacked.

The countess accepted the commission promptly, and two days later she brought the packet of letters and handed them to the kaiser, who burnt them before her eyes, and

thanked her with emotion for having saved his dynasty. That was how he put it, though in later years he pooh-poohed the notion that his American aunt had done anything for him.

The incident, however, gave Mary Lee a footing at court, and in record time she made herself indispensable. The emperor ventured once to ask her opinion during a political crisis. She gave him certain advice which he adopted, and it proved to be quite right. After that nothing was done without the approval of the kaiserin's aunt. Gradually the American girl became the power behind the throne. She helped to make and unmake Imperial Chancellors. She assisted in the drawing up of important dispatches. It was even rumoured that she actually wrote out speeches for the kaiser to deliver.

Naturally, the countess did not forget her husband. The count was not a brilliant soldier; indeed, he was a bit of a dunderhead, but Mary Lee—a born wirepuller—saw to it that his promotion was rapid. She eventually helped him to the top of the army, and it was as Field-Marshal von Waldersee that he was dispatched to China to command the allied force which put down the Boxer rebellion there in 1900. That expedition is now chiefly remembered on account of a famous speech the then kaiser delivered to the Field-Marshal and his army, an oration that earned for the Germans the nickname of Huns. “When you meet the foe,” said Wilhelm II to his soldiers at Kiel just before they took their departure for China, “you will defeat him. No quarter will be given; no

prisoners taken. Let all who fall into your hands be at your mercy. Gain a reputation like the Huns under Attila."

The Germans carried out his orders, and the Chinese still remember that it was only the indignant intervention of the British troops that prevented the kaiser's hordes from massacring every woman and child they came upon. The command of that expedition* was the Field-Marshal's last experience of power, for on his return he was quietly shelved owing to the fact that during his absence his wife had fallen into disfavour.

The breach between the kaiser and Mary Lee was caused by the former's hypocrisy. In her old age the American wife of the Field-Marshal became intensely religious, and she was greatly pleased when she found in her niece's husband a willing convert. Wilhelm II had ever since his accession been in the habit of quoting Scripture and had even preached sermons, but she now persuaded him to act less like a savage to the members of his own family. She had seen that he was heading towards disaster. His policy of trickery and dishonesty was not paying him. German diplomacy was becoming saturated with deceit. The shrewd American woman knew what the piling up of armaments meant, and she was sufficiently in the kaiser's confidence to be aware that he was planning a world-war in order to make himself the greatest force in Europe. But to her he was a mere puppet who was aping cleverness, and who was really the tool of his unscrupulous ministers.

She tried to reform him and she thought she had succeeded, for Wilhelm's prayers were the loudest and the longest, and he talked wildly of building churches and cathedrals. He sang lyrics in praise of peace, and Mary Lee was enthusiastic, and she told all her friends that the Chinese affair would be the last time German soldiers would be called upon to do anything except protect their own country from invasion.

But she was wrong, and a chance meeting with Prince Hohenlohe disillusioned her. She discovered that not only was the kaiser conspiring against the peace of Europe, but he was actively encouraging the establishment of a League of Germans in South America with a view to capturing that continent when he had paralysed his European rivals. The hot-tempered old woman boldly confronted him and there was a fearful scene in the Berlin Schloss. When she left the palace Wilhelm was foaming at the mouth, and it was hours before he recovered from the fit his rage had thrown him into.

As for Mary Lee she did not appear at court again, and thus the American woman who had influenced German policy for over twenty years passed out of the kaiser's life into obscurity.

CHAPTER XVI

THE GRAND DUKE PAUL AND OLGA KARNOVITCH

AMONG the few Russian princes who did not bring discredit on the House of Romanoff, the Grand Duke Paul for a long time stood conspicuous. As the uncle of the late Czar Nicholas of unhappy fate he was a very important personage in the Empire, and he took his position seriously, carrying himself with a dignity and a respect for public opinion that made him unique amongst his class. When a young man he married as respectably as a prince ought to, wedding a sister of King Constantine of Greece, now, of course, in exile, and thereby becoming by marriage a nephew of Queen Alexandra's. Meanwhile other Grand Dukes were causing the Imperial Family a lot of trouble, and the grave and steady Paul was frequently requested by the czar to use his influence to make them mend their ways. He did all he could, and he was personally so happy in his home life that he could not understand the fascination minor actresses and French adventuresses had for certain cousins of his.

Two years after his marriage, however, his wife died, leaving him with an infant daughter, who was destined to make history on her own

account later. The widower was inconsolable, and for some time he lived in retirement. When the inquisitive newspapers began to talk of the prospect of his marrying again he was furious and he denied in the most categorical manner that he had the slightest intention of replacing the wife for whom he still mourned. But even Grand Dukes—how archaic the rank seems now!—cannot foretell the future. The czar's uncle was persuaded to reappear in society, and then it was noticed that he was even more serious than usual. The gravity of his features was remarkable,—for a Grand Duke—and there was no competition for the honour of the company of a prince who seemed to be always thinking of his dead wife. It was very seldom that he would accept an invitation, and he met few persons outside the Royal Family.

Yet despite all this he eventually startled the world by his passion for a beautiful woman, a passion that came suddenly upon him and altered his whole life. All his good resolutions, his strength, and his principles went when he saw Olga Karnovitch. The man who had dwelt in solitude for ten years succumbed in a moment to the fascinations of a beauty who, by some inexplicable means, enthralled him and warmed his cold heart.

He met her for the first time at the palace of a relative who was giving a dinner party. Paul was not a welcome guest, for his young cousin, the host, looked upon him as a spoil-sport. However, he dare not be otherwise than pleasant, and, taking his courage in both hands, he asked

the Grand Duke Paul to escort Madame Olga Karnovitch into the dining-room. Olga was the wife of a Russian engineer whose profession took him often away from her side, and as she was delightfully pretty and witty she soon found her way into the best Petrograd house, where she had no difficulty in attracting the attentions of the more frivolous members of the Royal Family. She was tall and willowy, with perfect features, an oval face, delicate colouring, a pair of red lips, dark brown hair, and a most captivating voice. Olga combined the unrestraint and unconventionality of the well-born Russian with the good taste and charm of the French, and there was no more interesting and fascinating beauty in Petrograd when the Grand Duke made her acquaintance. Now it was obvious that no one could be dull or unhappy in Olga's company, and before he quite realised it Paul was enjoying himself like a boy of twenty. He was only forty, but he looked fifty, and had felt like sixty until Olga Karnovitch had begun to entertain him. Before he was half an hour in her society he was wishing that she was not married, and when at last they had to part he was determined that they should meet again very soon.

The duke was too good a judge of human nature not to see that Olga was very pleased at the prospect of making his better acquaintance. How she had ever consented to marry an engineer was amazing. She was a creature of pleasure, dainty, careless, and light-hearted. She knew that if she captured this prematurely aged prince she would jump into the very front

rank, and if she could not be a Grand Duchess she would have at least a title of nobility, and that would be something for the daughter of a minor official to achieve before she was thirty.

It was a gay and festive season that year in Petrograd, despite the Court mourning for Queen Victoria, and the Grand Duke suddenly blossomed out into the freshness and enthusiasm of youth. He was seen everywhere, and no one enjoyed himself more than he did. Once again his palace was brilliantly lighted up, and night after night it was filled with scores of guests, amongst whom Olga Karnovitch, the woman who had captured his heart, was always to be found.

As a rule Grand Dukes soon tire of women because they found lady-killing an easily acquired art, but Olga was something out of the ordinary, and Paul's love for her was no passing fancy. When well-meaning friends told him that she had not the best of reputations he retorted that she was at her worst as good as any of her slanderers. Had the woman been free the court party would assuredly have taken steps to prevent a marriage, and in that case pretty Olga might have disappeared, never to be heard of again. But because she was already a wife the Imperial Family considered the affair a passing fancy and were content to wait until the Grand Duke Paul would fall out of love with the siren.

This was, however, a really serious love affair. Paul wished with all his heart to make Olga his wife, and she was most eager to marry him. She gladly took counsel with him as to the

quickest way of bringing their union about. If Karnovitch, the husband, was aware of the intrigue he kept his knowledge to himself. He never hinted at a divorce, being aware that his wife's manner, while free and careless, was nothing worse. She might accompany the Grand Duke Paul to restaurants and theatres; but there was nothing wrong in that, according to the Russian standard, and as both Olga and Paul did not wish to create a scandal they were grateful for his complaisance. But such a state of affairs could not long continue. The prince was too restless and worried. Apart from Olga he had no interest in life, and he wished to make her his wife and settle down away from court life. Several times the czar referred to his well-known flirtation with Olga, and Paul guessed that his nephew and emperor was beginning to wonder when the friendship would come to an end.

It was shortly after the coronation of King Edward VII that the Grand Duke asked the czar to lend him the Imperial yacht, *Standart*, so that he might go for a cruise in the Mediterranean. Nicholas was only too willing to oblige him. A confidential secretary had reported that Olga Karnovitch had left Petrograd, having apparently quarrelled with her royal friend and parted from him for ever, and the emperor was only too pleased to help his uncle to forget the charmer. He had been afraid that a scandal damaging to the dynasty might result from that unequal friendship, and he cheerfully ascribed Paul's strained appearance and nervous manner

to the result of the final scene with the woman for whom he had conceived an unreasonable admiration.

The Grand Duke started for the Mediterranean in the *Standart* in the pleasant month of September, 1902, and after touching at several ports he ordered the captain to make for Algiers. This apparently casual decision was really part of a carefully planned scheme, for the day before Paul arrived at Algiers Olga Karnovitch arrived from Paris and took up her residence at a local hotel.

The yacht was no sooner in the harbour than a messenger came on board with a letter addressed to H.I.H. the Grand Duke Paul of Russia, and when the latter received it he tore the envelope open, only to draw in a deep breath of relief when he had read the simple sentence, "I am here, Olga."

That evening he left the yacht and made his way to one of the leading hotels in the town. When he entered the restaurant he walked straight across the room to a deep bay window where a pretty woman was sitting smoking a cigarette. Paul and Olga were together once more after a separation which had seemed an eternity to both of them.

Realising that they must bring matters to a head the lovers had agreed to elope. A terrible scandal would inevitably result, but they considered that the end would justify all the trouble and anxiety. On this occasion they were both excited and reckless and in a dare-devil mood. Paul talked wildly as though he was aware that

he was going to destruction and that as nothing could save him nothing mattered.

They dined in a private room, which was specially decorated for the occasion. The hotel manager probably knew who his male patron was, but he was discreet and did not talk. The "Russian gentleman" paid lavishly for silence as well as for the luxuries he and his lady friend consumed, and never before had the hotel sold its champagne at so great a profit. It seemed incredible that so many bottles should be opened for two persons only. Excited and nervous before they touched a glass of wine it was only to be expected that the champagne should excite them both to a state of frenzy. Paul was haunted by the fear of what would happen when the czar heard that he had eloped with Olga, and he knew that Nicholas's anger would be all the greater because he would realise that he had been tricked into helping the lovers by lending them his yacht. Paul had, however, with commendable foresight, already transferred a goodly sum to his credit at a bank in Paris, but he was loath to part with the revenues from his large estates and the several little jobs—all sinecures—which brought in so much money every year. He was also mortally afraid of King Edward's censure, for His Majesty had more than once written to the czar remonstrating with the conduct of his relatives and warning him that they would pay dearly in the long run for their extravagant defiance of the conventions. The Grand Duke admired King Edward, and in his heart of hearts he was ashamed of himself.

In trying to escape from his black thoughts he overdrank to such an extent that he lost his senses and became a raving madman. In vain Olga implored him to keep quiet and reminded him that everything depended on secrecy. Paul shouted and wept and smashed the furniture and shrieked for poison, and Olga, terrified into sobriety, could only shrink into a corner and wonder if it would spoil their plans if she rang the bell for the waiters to come to her assistance. She had never seen the staid prince in this condition before, and she did not know what to do.

And then the wild orgie was in a moment changed into tragedy. Paul, after protesting against his own follies, drew a revolver and attempted to commit suicide. The bullet inflicted a nasty wound in his forehead, and owing to loss of blood he collapsed in a heap on the floor. Secrecy could be maintained no longer now, and the half-fainting woman had just sufficient strength to press the bell before she, too, became unconscious.

The hotel manager headed the rush of servants, and being discreet and accustomed to the eccentricities of Russian Grand Dukes he did not lose his head. He summoned a doctor whom he knew he could trust, and, whilst Olga was conveyed to a room and put to bed, the duke's wound was bound up, and his life saved.

A couple of days later Paul awoke to find his head heavily bandaged, and to realise the full gravity of his position. Olga was sitting beside his bed, pale with terror and almost hysterical.

When she told him what he had done he implored her forgiveness. He had, indeed, made a fool of himself, and already swarms of persons were daily gathering in the vicinity of the hotel hoping to catch a glimpse of the "Royal millionaire who had met with an accident," as a local paper had tactfully announced.

Their situation was desperate and their plight deplorable. What would the world say when their story was published? Paul had ruined their chances of making good. The czar and his German wife would take advantage of his folly to confiscate for their own use his immense estates and the deposits he had in various Russian banks. Marriage was out of the question now, Olga sobbed, and refused to be comforted. But the Grand Duke rose to the occasion. He meant to brazen it out, especially when the manager assured him that his identity was still unknown. Not a single newspaper had printed his name and rank, and it was popularly supposed in Algiers that he was a certain French millionaire who was known to be somewhere in the Mediterranean with a lady he was going to marry at the first opportunity.

The crew of the Imperial yacht consisted of picked men who knew how to hold their tongues. The czar had had them specially trained in discretion, and as they were well paid and comfortable, the penalty for gossip—dismissal—was too heavy to be incurred. Paul therefore knew that he could rely upon them, but the difficulty was how to get from the hotel to the yacht without being observed.

He first told Olga to go to Paris and wait for him there. Then he sent a message to the captain of the *Standart* ordering him to be ready to receive him at midnight and to be ready to steam away at a moment's notice. When Olga left him Paul had several hours to pass in solitude ere it was his turn to creep from the hotel.

There was hardly anyone about when he emerged into the street, and for this he was glad, because his bandaged head made him very conspicuous. He nearly ran all the way to the harbour, where he was quickly taken aboard the czar's yacht, being happily unaware that he had been shadowed all the way from the hotel to the harbour by an enterprising French journalist.

When he returned to Petrograd Paul found the capital full of rumours in which his name prominently figured. He was told that Karnovitch, the engineer, was thirsting for his blood, but he smiled at this, because he knew that the fellow was no fire-eater. What pleased him most was the uncertainty that prevailed as to the identity of the bandaged stranger who had crept aboard the Imperial yacht at Algiers. No one seemed to know the identity of the man who had undoubtedly attempted to commit suicide, and when the emperor casually referred to the coupling of his name with the story Paul laughingly denied it. It was an invention of a French journalist, he swore, for the Imperial yacht could never be used for such a purpose. Nicholas believed him because he wished to. He was tired of Grand Ducal indiscretions, and he liked

to think that his uncle was at any rate not such a fool as to make himself notorious by taking part in a melodramatic scene in an Algerian café with a scheming woman.

Shortly afterwards Paul left Russia to pay one of his customary visits to Paris, that paradise of princes. When he had gone the fashionable world was startled by the news that Karnovitch was going to divorce his wife, and that the lady would as soon as possible become the morganatic wife of the Grand Duke Paul of Russia. Poor Nicholas, weak-minded, not knowing what to do or think, implored his wife to advise him for the best, and that true German instantly voted for the adoption of sledge-hammer methods, Paul was to be threatened and reviled and bullied like a rebellious conscript. Bellicose and insulting telegrams were therefore dispatched to him, and he was ordered to return at once to Russia and sue for forgiveness. The czarina wrote to her cousin, the kaiser, asking him to interfere, but Wilhelm discreetly declined, expressing at the same time the opinion that the masterful woman who had been born a princess of Hesse was quite capable of dealing with her rebellious uncle.

With amazing celerity Karnovitch obtained his divorce, and despite remonstrances from the czar and sarcastic messages from younger relatives whose matrimonial escapades he had severely censured in the past, Paul insisted upon marrying Olga. It was a morganatic marriage, of course, and she could not take his name or rank, but Paul was not so helpless as the czarina

imagined, and he assured his bride that he would see that she had all the rights her position as his wife entitled her to.

Once the runaway couple were man and wife the machinations of their enemies ceased so far as attempts to separate them were concerned, but it was hoped that the czar would refuse a title of nobility to the woman and confiscate the prince's possession. The czarina was in favour of both courses, and, as Nicholas was as clay in her hands, it seemed, on the face of it, certain that they would be permanently banished from Russia.

For some months the Grand Duke lived quietly in Paris. The papers occasionally referred to the czar's punitive measures against him, but the prince was not to be dragged into a discussion, and he was pleasant and cordial to all his acquaintances. Olga, too, settled down, and there could be no doubt that they were in love with each other. Rumours did not affect them, for Olga relied completely upon her husband's promise that all would come right eventually. There was no necessity to retrench, and when he wanted money he assured her that he would send to Russia for it and that no one would attempt to prevent his bankers complying with his orders.

It sounded very mysterious to Olga, and in spite of her confidence she was very nervous when he announced his intention to revisit the capital of his native country. She reminded him that the newspaper, *Le Matin*, had declared that it was the czar's intention to have him turned

back at the frontiers if he attempted to enter Russia, but Paul smiled enigmatically and booked his seat in the express, and without encountering any opposition he reached Petrograd and called at the official residence of the emperor.

When he returned to Paris and to the arms of his wife he brought with him not only a very large sum of money but also a title for her. Henceforth she was to be known as the Countess von Hohenfelsen, and she was to be recognised as his wife by all the royal families of Europe. Of course, it was to remain a morganatic union, but that did not affect its legality, and any children would be legitimate and would have titles bestowed on them.

What had happened to cause this sudden change of front on the czar's part? The answer is that the Grand Duke Paul knew too much, and was personally too influential and powerful to be treated with contempt by the woman the kaiser had placed on the throne of Russia to watch over the interests of Germany. Paul—finding his courage now that he had burnt his boats behind him—had gone to the czarina, and had bluntly informed her that unless she recognised Olga Karnovitch as his wife he would head a movement against her and the large number of German spies who were fattening on the generosity of the easy-going Russians. That was the explanation of his triumph, for it was the perturbed czarina who induced her husband to grant a title to his uncle's morganatic wife.

The marriage has been a successful one,

though occasionally the ex-Grand Duke Paul has been reminded of his elopement and in a way he does not appreciate. A few years ago, for example, his daughter, who married Prince William of Sweden, arrived one night unexpectedly at his Paris residence. "I have left my husband," she said calmly, "and I do not intend to go back to him." In vain did the prince try to induce her to alter her decision, and when he was in danger of losing his temper she reminded him of his own second matrimonial venture, and that he had better make the best of things and help her. He did so, and took his daughter's part with the result that she was restored to her former rank of Russian Grand Duchess until the debacle swept the Romanoffs out of Russia.

CHAPTER XVII

A SWEDISH ROMANCE

MANY years ago a small boy whilst wandering disconsolately in the royal palace at Stockholm met the Court Chamberlain, an imposing personage in gorgeous raiment, and asked him a question that fairly staggered the old man.

"Why is it that papa and mamma married when they say that they never loved one another?" said the boy, earnestly. The Chamberlain started in amazement. He had thought that the child was too young to guess the tragedy of his mother's life, and he tried to evade answering, but the boy, who was Prince Oscar of Sweden, persisted.

"Well, your Royal Highness," he said, slowly and awkwardly, "you see kings and queens don't marry for themselves but for their people. They have to sacrifice their own feelings for the good of the nation."

"Then I'm glad I'm not a king," said Prince Oscar, flushing, "and I hope I never will be, for I don't want to be unhappy." He ran off to join his brothers, but the Chamberlain never forgot that startling encounter to the day of his death.

It cannot be said that Prince Oscar's boyhood

was a happy one. His brave mother did all in her power to protect him from the tyranny of his father, and she tried hard to prevent the child overhearing the furious outbursts of his father against her. With this object in view she sent the children, in charge of governesses and tutors, to one of the king's country castles, but they could not always live in exile from their parents, and because of this at an early age they became acquainted with their mother's plight. It was quite impossible for them to see her face without asking a reason for dried tears and a pallor which was in keeping with the hunted look in her eyes, and Prince Oscar, a sharp, intelligent lad, was quick to see that she was most unhappy, and as he grew older he resolved to save himself from the fate that had overtaken his mother. He realised that a prince was only a human being with ordinary human emotions, and that to marry for reasons of State and not for love was to court disaster.

Oscar grew to manhood to the accompaniment of an ever-increasing popularity. Sweden is a democratic country, and His Royal Highness could mix freely with all sorts and conditions of persons without losing any caste. He had the simplest tastes, and the crooked ways of courts only annoyed him and aroused his derision. Every day he lived he must have felt more pleased than ever that he had not been born his father's eldest son and heir to the throne.

Queen Sophie, that famous matchmaker, waited until the prince was in the early twenties before she set about finding a wife for him. She had

already half a dozen names on her list, all eligible princesses with fortunes, and an alliance with any one of the six would have meant a strengthening of Sweden's political position. Now while Oscar was quite willing to marry he made it a condition that he should fall in love with the girl of his choice, whether she was a princess or a peasant. So he dutifully attended his mother on her foreign travels, met scores of pretty 'girls, royal and noble, and returned to Stockholm perfectly heart-whole and the despair of his mother.

She had done her best, she said, but he was quite impossible to please. Oscar laughed and patted her cheek, and promised to let his mother know when he had made up his mind. An angry word never passed between mother and son. Oscar knew how much she had suffered and was still suffering, and he was gentleness personified to her all her life, doing what he could to make up for his father's persecution.

But when the queen began to despair of ever being able to find a wife for her beloved son the truth was that she had already unconsciously succeeded. A year earlier Her Majesty had found that one of her ladies-in-waiting had been paid by King Oscar to spy upon her movements, and, although there could be nothing evil to report, the queen felt that this person could not be trusted. She, therefore, dismissed her, and in her place appointed a charming young lady of the name of Ebba Munck. Miss Munck was the daughter of a man in a good 'position, who belonged to the old order

of Swedish nobility, but what appealed strongly to Queen Sophie was her modest nature and her devotion to religion. The new lady-in-waiting was a loyal and devoted companion to her, and if she had no claims to be considered a great beauty there was something in her pale features, eloquent grey eyes, and lissome figure which, added to her compelling personality, lifted her altogether out of the ordinary, and made her one of the most notable figures at the court of Sweden. Furthermore, her high principles were a guarantee that she would not be lured into any participation in the intrigues of the queen's husband.

Such was Ebba Munck when Prince Oscar returned from a holiday in Germany. He was, to use a homely expression, "fed-up" with the type of woman he had met in Berlin. Prussian princesses have never been remarkable for their charm. It was old William I who remarked when his nephew and heir became engaged to the Princess Royal of Great Britain, afterwards the Empress Frederick, "Thank God, we are going to have a lady at court who will know how to behave herself." Prince Oscar, a simple-minded gentleman who did not believe that pleasure is everything, was tired of artificial amiability. He had no use for the insincere, and his acquaintance with German home-life had resulted in a decision not to marry anyone from that country. The hypocrisy of the present ex-Kaiser had disgusted him, too, while those who mocked religion in his presence must have been unaware that the young Swedish

Prince was deeply religious, and that he could not bear to listen to attacks on Christianity.

He, therefore, returned to the palace at Stockholm in a frame of mind that few could understand, but one person certainly did, and she was Miss Ebba Munck when she was sitting next to him at an informal dinner party where, because King Oscar was absent, all could be natural and easy for the time being. Prince Oscar was charmed beyond measure at the rare personality of the pretty girl who was able, amid the gaieties of court life, to preserve her innocence and simplicity. He asked her to go out riding with him the following morning, and, as two others were invited, she consented. Prince Oscar had been accustomed to honour the ladies of his acquaintance with similar invitations, but this desire for the society of Miss Ebba Munck was no passing fancy; it was, in fact, the beginning of a strong and enduring passion.

From that day Oscar and Ebba were practically inseparable, though, because they were seldom alone, no one seemed to suspect that the prince had lost his heart to the girl who was looked down upon by the more pretentious beauties of the court. Ebba Munck was never considered as likely to make a brilliant "match." She dressed so plainly and so soberly that she might have been the Cinderella of the palace. However, this very reputation of hers proved a godsend, for it enabled the lovers, long after they had confessed their love to one another, to keep their secret and to prevent a premature explosion on the part of the king.

But they could not expect to live for ever in this paradise of their own imagining. Once Oscar was certain that he loved Ebba and was loved in return he proposed to her, and he heard her trembling answer as they stood beside the small lake in the grounds of the palace. She was too much in love to refuse him, but she warned him that his father would disapprove, and that they would have to face the bitter opposition of the most powerful man in the kingdom. Oscar reassured her and swore that he would marry her, if not in Sweden, then in a foreign country, for he was determined that she should be his wife. That very night he told his mother, and Queen Sophie, who loved both of them, took him in her arms and with tears in her eyes prayed for his happiness. She knew that Ebba would be worthy of his ideals, and she also knew that her son's charming, gentle spirit would not be able to exist much longer in the unhealthy atmosphere of an artificial court. He would be at his best as a country gentleman, a good husband and father.

"I understand, Oscar," she said, with emotion, "and I will help you two all I can, but I know your father will be very angry. He is anxious to see all his children married to members of reigning houses. You know that until he married me he was not accepted as an equal by the other European royalties because his grandfather was once a humble French private soldier. But I love you dearly, and I want to see you and yours happy before I die."

A little later, Ebba, smiling through her tears

and blushes, was taken into the family conference. The only enemy was, of course, Oscar's father, the King of Sweden, who was the only person who could prevent the marriage. It was settled that the queen should break the news to her husband and that she was to impress upon him the fact that Oscar was prepared to abandon everything, rank and fortune, and emigrate to America, if necessary, and as a citizen of the great Republic become the husband of the girl he loved. Her Majesty advised the lovers to be prepared for trouble, but she assured them that she would succeed in time in overcoming the king's opposition.

The interview between the king and queen was a stormy one, and her husband's furious voice could be heard a long way from the *salon* in which he raved and threatened his wife and children. He declared that it was a conspiracy against him, and he wept from sheer spite when he realised that the constitution of Sweden did not permit him either to imprison or banish Miss Ebba Munck. But the result was that King Oscar forbade his son and Miss Munck meeting again; he ordered the girl to leave the palace at once, and he threatened that if Oscar disobeyed him he would turn him out of his home without a penny.

It was what they had expected, and yet Prince Oscar was stunned by it. It would have been easy for him to persuade Miss Munck to marry him secretly, but then he knew that the king could proclaim such a union to be illegal, and the consequences to his bride might be disastrous.

He wished above all things to avoid dragging the name of the girl he loved through the gutter. He valued her and adored her above all earthly beings; he was only too well aware that in every respect she was far superior to all the princesses he had met, and, therefore, he resolved to fight for the right to marry Ebba in public and in circumstances that would prove to the world that by all the laws of men, as of God, she was his loving and faithful wife.

At least a score of times during the ensuing two years Queen Sophie implored her husband to sanction the union of the lovers, and on each occasion she suffered contumely and insult, but she nevertheless encouraged the lovers to wait patiently, and when she was abroad she enlisted the sympathy of her fellow-queens. Her Majesty Queen Victoria heard the story from her own lips and did her best to comfort a lady for whom she always entertained the greatest respect and affection; even the kaiserin, who could be human when the kaiser was not near, secretly sided with Prince Oscar, and others in great positions sympathised with him and his mother. But, of course, as long as the King of Sweden withheld his consent a legal marriage could not take place.

It is certain that Prince Oscar and Miss Munck would have emigrated to America if it had not been for Queen Sophie. They knew that her life was a most unhappy one, and that it was only her love for her children that kept her alive, and because they had it in their power to help her to bear her hard lot they remained, hoping

against hope that King Oscar would relent when he realised that nothing could alter their determination. But the old king was adamant. Perhaps his attitude was inspired by a desire to make his wife more unhappy, if that were possible, but whatever the motive he managed to divide Stockholm society into two camps, the smaller one approving of his action, the other condemning him for a cruel and tyrannical husband and father.

Nearly two years had elapsed when Prince Oscar informed his mother that he could not consent to any further delay. He had discovered that a determined attempt was being made to frighten his fiancée into giving him up, and he knew that there was a conspiracy against the girl which might at any moment result in her death. Their enemies, if few, were powerful, but, as if realising that they dare not injure him, they were concentrating their venom on the defenceless girl.

Queen Sophie understood and sympathised. She had been compelled to ignore a regular campaign of calumny against Miss Munck that must have overwhelmed her had the young lady's reputation not been as pure as it was. Even her bitterest enemies were aware of her goodness and piety, and those who wished to mix her up with scandal found it impossible to obtain any credence or support. Yet it was an excessively trying situation. Miss Munck found it difficult to appear in public; at court functions she was, of course, conspicuous by her absence, and peace and quietness were denied

her, even in her country retreat, where King Oscar was having her watched so that if possible he might prevent her secretly joining his son and leaving the country with him.

But, as I have said, it was Prince Oscar who brought matters to a head. When he realised fully how acutely Miss Munck was suffering he, like the chivalrous man he was, decided to solve the problem which had been troubling them for close on two years. They would be married at once, he declared, and in his mother's presence he repeated and emphasised his decision. He did not ask her to obtain his father's consent. He was scarcely interested in him now.

The queen, always anxious for peace, begged her husband to give his consent to avoid a public scandal. Very bravely she pointed out that it would be useless opposing any further, and that, as the king of a democratic people, he would mortally offend them if he tried to revive out-of-date laws and declare his son's marriage illegal because it was a love match. She spoke gently, yet persuasively, and at last King Oscar, knowing that he was helpless, grudgingly surrendered.

"Very well, then," he said angrily, "let them be married in England, but I decline to be present at the ceremony. I will not be a witness to the humiliation of our House." Queen Sophie, who had a keen sense of humour, did not smile. She was too elated at her victory to think of anything else, and within a few hours she was assisting her son and his fiancée with their final plans.

On March 15, 1888, Prince Oscar of Sweden was married to Miss Ebba Munck at St. Stephen's Church, Bournemouth, in the presence of a large and distinguished congregation. They had previously gone through a ceremony before the registrar at Christchurch. In the circumstances there could not be many royalties present in the church—the presence of the Prince of Wales, for example, would have rendered necessary an escort of soldiers to control the crowds, entailing too much publicity for all concerned, but Her Majesty Queen Victoria was unofficially represented by her daughter-in-law, the Duchess of Albany, then a young widow.

The people of Bournemouth gave bride and bridegroom a great reception, and the Queen of Sweden also came in for a share of their plaudits. It was particularly noticed how gracious Her Majesty was to the young bride. Tears trickled down her cheeks when a few moments after Miss Munck had become her daughter-in-law she drew her into her arms and kissed her on both cheeks. Sophie of Sweden was assuredly a great queen because she was a very human one.

After a short honeymoon Prince Oscar took his bride back to Stockholm to settle with the king the question of their status. The prince willingly dropped the prefix of "Royal Highness" and became just Prince Bernadotte, and their children, it was decided, were to be styled Counts and Countesses of Wisborg.

Of course, the king and his friends shook their heads knowingly when the newly married pair returned, and they openly prophesied early

disaster, and wondered how long it would be before Prince Oscar was back in Stockholm trying to induce the authorities to annul his marriage.

That was over thirty-one years ago, and to-day the Prince and Princess Bernadotte are still lovers. They have children who are their delight, and there never has been any doubt as to the success of the royal prince's morganatic marriage. He and his wife are envied by all who know them, and their sons are showing abilities which place them far above the average. They are a credit to their country and very popular with their relatives. When Princess Margaret of Connaught married Prince Oscar's nephew, the present Crown Prince of Sweden, she came to know "Prince and Princess Bernadotte," and ever since she has been one of their greatest friends, for she admires them for their steadfastness to one another in the days when their happiness was at stake.

They do not take any part in public life, but sometimes a grey-haired gentleman, rather carelessly dressed, is to be seen sauntering through one of the parks in Stockholm. He is Prince Oscar, as the locals will tell you, the prince who married for love and has never had reason to regret it.

CHAPTER XVIII

AN ARCHDUKE'S TWO MARRIAGES

AMONGST living archdukes the one with the most remarkable history is Leopold, best known in history as the brother of the ex-Crown Princess of Saxony, the woman who ran away from a throne to marry a pianist. But he deserves to be remembered on his own account, for in his peculiar way he has added some amusing chapters to the story of the Hapsburgs.

The archduke is a cousin of the ex-Emperor Charles, and from his boyhood days he was a hater of etiquette. He could not stand the starchy archduchesses who looked like dolls and acted like machines, for Leopold had the rare good fortune for a Hapsburg to be born healthy, and he scarcely had a day's illness. As a young officer he was intensely popular with his soldiers, greatly to the jealousy of his brother officers, one of whom complained to the Emperor Francis Joseph that the Archduke Leopold was guilty of the "terrible crime" of being considerate to those placed in his charge. Leopold enjoyed himself wherever he went. He was "hail-fellow-well-met" with everybody, and his friends and relations were horrified when they heard that he would conveniently forget his

promise to dine at a princely house in order that he might drop in at some cottage and partake of fish and potatoes with a family of peasants. "He will come to a bad end," Francis Joseph groaned, when after an angry interview with his rebellious kinsman he had heard himself addressed contemptuously as "Herr Schratt" by the incorrigible archduke.

In the circumstances hardly anyone expected Leopold to marry a girl of his own rank. Many of his relatives had taken their wives from amongst the people, and most of them had not done any worse than if they had wedded as the emperor had wished them to, but Leopold's first love was a princess, and but for a family dispute he would have married her. When the proposed match was abandoned he went back to his regiment and began a life of riotous pleasure.

The time came, however, when he fell in love again, and then it was not with a person of royal blood. He happened to be in a Vienna theatre when he was particularly struck by the beauty of one of the chorus girls. Her name he learnt later was Wilhelmina Adamovics, and her father was a postal official in an obscure town. The girl was very pretty and possessed of considerable intelligence, and she captivated the Archduke Leopold, who believed that she was his soul-mate within an hour of making her acquaintance.

The emperor's spies soon obtained full particulars of his infatuation, and the usual efforts were made to part the lovers. Fräulein Adamovics was apparently inclined to give her royal

friend's relatives no trouble. She announced that she believed in free-love, and that a marriage ceremony was not necessary in the case of "soul-mates." When Francis Joseph's emissaries heard this from her own lips they reported that whoever Leopold married it would not be the chorus girl, who did not wish to marry him, and consequently the archduke and Wilhelmina were not molested by the authorities as other archdukes and their obscure sweethearts had been in the past. Surprisingly little attention was paid to them by the Press, which had long ceased to chronicle the misadventures of the Hapsburgs.

But Leopold had no intention of taking advantage of the foolish ideas so placidly enunciated by the young beauty. He wished to marry and settle down. Many years of life in Imperial circles had sickened him of court life, and the prospect of passing his days in obscurity was now his solitary wish. The emperor tried to influence him by promises of further honours and a large income, but he rejected them with scorn.

When Leopold suddenly published his intention to marry Fräulein Adamovics the news sent old Francis Joseph into a senile fury. He wept aloud, and called upon Heaven to spare him this indignity. He was a very old man then, and it was thought that he would never recover from the shock, but worse was to ensue. Leopold came to the Hofburg and demanded an interview with his sovereign, who received him with a black brow.

"If you marry this creature," said the emperor wrathfully, "you will not be permitted to call yourself an archduke, and I will deprive you of your pay as colonel and your income of forty thousand crowns."

"I must, nevertheless, marry the lady I love," answered Leopold calmly, "and as for renouncing my title I have already arranged for that. In future I shall call myself Herr Wulfling, and it is as such that I have the honour to bid you good-bye, Herr Schratt."

It is said that when the agitated ringing of the bell brought the royal attendants to the emperor's room they found him quite alone and gasping for breath.

Leopold's abrupt decision was due to the fact that he had heard from his sister, the Crown Princess of Saxony, that she was contemplating leaving her husband and children, and the archduke, therefore, wished to get his business done before the world heard of his sister's "exploit." Fräulein Adamovics, despite her unconventional opinions, was really delighted to marry him. It was an achievement for the daughter of an obscure postal official to wed an archduke, even if he did call himself "Herr Wulfling." Ambitious, vain, and eccentric as she was, Wilhelmina felt that she had done something better than attaining eminence on the stage, for, after all, what could be more dramatic than this sensational rise to fame!

Quite apart from his rank, Leopold was a man capable of winning any woman's heart. Physically he was good to look upon, and his charming

manners captivated everybody. Wilhelmina had no wish to mingle in fashionable circles, and she had planned out a peculiar mode of living for both of them, but at the same time she was inordinately vain of her conquest, and when her sister-in-law fled from Dresden and she came in for some of the limelight focussed upon the crown prince by that event, she enjoyed it more than anyone else.

When they had been married Leopold took her to Zurich, and when they arrived there, travelling as Herr and Frau Wulfling, he informed her that his sister would join them within forty-eight hours. Leopold added that Louisa was simply dying to know her and that she wished to participate in their quiet, matter-of-fact life. Wilhelmina was enchanted. To be able to call a real live princess sister was joy indeed. She reminded herself that Louisa's eldest son would be a king one day—the defeat of Germany prevented that—and then the daughter of a postman would be the aunt of a reigning monarch! It was only natural that she was hardly able to wait until the proper moment came for her to see the ultra-temperamental Crown Princess of Saxony.

At last she was informed that Her Royal Highness was waiting for her at the leading hotel in Zurich, and Wilhelmina rushed off, found the right room, and ran towards Louisa with open arms. But the princess, who had talked a lot about the joys of democracy, had really no wish to come too close to the people, and she received her brother's wife with a cool-

ness that was tantamount to dislike. Poor Wilhelmina was bitterly disappointed, and her embarrassment only ended when Louisa left Zurich and Leopold was alone with her. During Louisa's stay in the Swiss town the archduke had worked valiantly on her behalf, but, of course, his morganatic marriage had offended his parents and the Emperor, Francis Joseph, who would not listen to his appeals on behalf of his unfortunate sister.

With the departure of the woman who was to marry Signor Toselli, the archduke and his wife set about preparing their own home. Wilhelmina had by now exchanged her "free-love" ideas for a whole-hearted belief in the "Simple Life," and she succeeded in winning her husband over to the new doctrine. Happiness, she said, was only possible when divorced from luxury. Even a modern villa was barred by this courageous person. "We will live in a hut in the woods and forget that tradesmen exist," she said, "and when we want food we'll climb trees and eat what Nature grows." There were other regulations, the principal being a minimum of clothing and the prohibition of shaving. Leopold agreed with everything, and in the late summer of 1902 the "Simple Lifers" started to find a home in the forest.

For a season the archduke went about the woods scantily clothed and subsisting on the common fruits of the earth, looking like a wild man from Borneo. Strange stories began to circulate of the bearded giant who seemed akin to a gorilla who was to be found wandering

amongst the trees at night with another creature who had the outward appearance of a human being. Herr Wulfling and his wife heard none of these rumours, but went their own way, Wilhelmina growing more and more pleased with herself. What the ex-archduke's feelings were he, perhaps wisely, kept to himself.

But when he ventured amongst human beings his resolution failed him. As long as he was with his wife her influence saved him for the cause she had so much at heart. Away from her he became more of an archduke and less of a democratic Simple Lifer.

It happened that one afternoon he was strolling along the high road, bronzed and tanned, with a long beard, and his hair falling below his shoulders, when he came upon a group of small boys. For a few moments their eyes dilated and their tongues protruded as they stared at the apparition before them. The archduke, clad only in trousers, smiled good-humouredly, for he was fond of children, but the youngsters did not see that smile. He appeared to them to be a lunatic, and with the thoughtlessness of youth they began to jeer him.

Leopold escaped from his tormentors with difficulty, and when he was alone again he became agitated by doubts. He asked himself if he was deserving of the epithets that the boys had applied to him. He had not seen a mirror for months, and he was consequently unable to tell the effect the Simple Life was having upon him.

"I think I'll look at myself," he murmured

nervously, recalling Wilhelmina's stringent rules. "She needn't know."

The temptation was irresistible, and half an hour later he startled the owner of a hairdresser's establishment by suddenly thrusting himself into the shop and surveying his unkempt beard and tanned cheeks in the big mirror. For a few moments the archduke solemnly scrutinised himself, and in that brief time he came to the conclusion that the Simple Life was not for him. He had been a dandy in his time; no one had looked better in the uniform of a crack Austrian regiment; his handsome appearance had once been the talk of Vienna drawing-rooms, but now he was not human. He had no desire to be an ape. Not that he sighed for the delights of a palace. He was still determined to be one of the people, but he was finished with the wild life of the woods, and he meant to go back to civilisation.

Austrian archdukes are not in the habit of buying cheap, ready-made suits, but Leopold could not wait to have clothes made to order, and after he had been shaved he went to the nearest shop and bought a suit there and then. It did not fit him, but he was easily pleased now. Once he was clothed he could enter a hotel, engage a suite of rooms, and, incidentally, have a good square meal. That meal completed his restoration to sanity.

When Frau Wulfling found him there she expostulated volubly. She was as devoted a "Simple Lifer" as ever she had been, and she wrestled with her errant husband until they

quarrelled violently and she sought refuge in tears and reproaches. The upshot of it was that he told her that they were obviously unsuited to one another and that the sooner they parted the better.

It was a sad end to their romance, but neither made any attempt to heal the breach. Of course, Wilhelmina was unable to wander about the woods alone, and she, too, had to return to the ordinary haunts of mankind. The Archduke Leopold consulted a firm of lawyers, and arrangements were made for a divorce. It was rumoured in Vienna that this was the first step "Herr Wulfling" was taking with a view to a return to his former life, but Vienna was mistaken. Leopold had not changed his opinion that "Court life is dull, stupid, and wretched. Everything about it is unsufferable. I cannot breathe at court. A free man has the world at his feet, but a prince, or a king is the puppet of his surroundings. Kings are just like other men. Not one in a hundred is worth a cent."

These are his own words, written down in black and white, and by his conduct the Archduke Leopold proved that he really believed them.

Wilhelmina offered no objection to the divorce proceedings, and with amazing promptness the couple who had married in haste were unmarried with equally surprising celerity. "He will now beg for pardon at the Hofburg," said his relatives, and they smiled knowingly when they heard that he was engaged to Fräulein Ritter, a lady of respectable and humble birth. But

the second morganatic marriage "put the lid on," as the Yankees say. Poor Francis Joseph forbade the mention of his name, and no paper which referred to the matrimonial adventurer was permitted to enter the palace. Several members of Viennese society were banished from the court because they were suspected of being in correspondence with "Herr Wulfling," and when the emperor heard that he was drawing an income from property within his dominions he gave orders that no more money was to be paid to Leopold. The command arrived too late, however, for the wily archduke had already disposed of his interest and had safely invested the proceeds outside Austria.

Fräulein Ritter proved a much more successful wife than the chorus girl. She liked a comfortable home and plenty to eat, and with the archduke she found a decent-sized villa, furnished it comfortably, and with him settled down to the life of an ordinary Swiss citizen. He was so pleased with Fräulein Ritter that he decided to become a naturalised Swiss, and, having complied with the usual formalities, he was admitted to all the rights and privileges of a citizen of the Swiss Republic. The act horrified his Austrian friends, and even those who had regarded the two morganatic marriages as jokes were scandalised by Leopold's preference for Switzerland over his native country. It was an innovation that they resented. Other archdukes had married morganatically, but only Leopold had refused to retain his nationality. But their resentment did not affect him in the

slightest degree. He was now a plain citizen, and he found the life to his liking. He and his wife were soon popular, and their unambitious dinner parties were the events of the season in their humble sphere of life. They led ordinary lives, only once relieved from monotony, and that was by an action for slander which "Herr Wulfling" brought against a journalist.

It was an amusing affair altogether. From the time of his first marriage Leopold had been carefully watched by the Swiss Press. Most of the journalists were of the opinion that the archduke was only posing and that he was simply using his alias and his residence in Switzerland to conceal from prying eyes deeds which it would have been impossible to hide in Austria. During his married spell with Wilhelmina Adamovics he was regarded as eccentric, and when he became the husband of Fräulein Ritter it was thought that he would reveal his true self. He was spied upon by sensation-seekers, and when they were disappointed one journalist brought imagination to his aid and wrote an article which began by declaring that "Herr Wulfling" was a bad citizen who did not pay his rates, and went on to say that he was leading a dissipated life, and had always been known for his evil character.

This was more than the democratic archduke could stand, and he entered an action for slander. It was duly defended, and when "Herr Wulfling" proved that he had been a regular ratepayer he proceeded to demand proofs from the defendant of his statements as to character. Of course,

the journalist had to admit that he had nothing to advance in extenuation, and then Leopold, determined to kill the slander, showed that he had always been a good husband, and that there was no Swiss citizen more anxious than he was for the fair fame of the country which had admitted him to its rights and privileges. In the end the judges found for "Herr Wulfling," delivering a highly laudatory judgment, which placed on record the fact that there was at least one archduke who was a credit to his family.

Since his second marriage the archduke has been practically forgotten by the world, but now and then visitors to Switzerland are reminded of his existence. Once when he was in Berne he happened to see an old lady struggling with a heavy parcel. He insisted upon carrying it for her to the cheap hotel she was staying at. When she offered him a "tip" he declined it, and later someone in the hotel told her that the man she had supposed to be a poor person trying to earn a few pence was the ex-Archduke who called himself "Herr Wulfling." But now and then he has found his discarded rank of use. Thus when he was travelling on the railway and had to confess that he had lost his ticket and had no money on him to pay he was in danger of spending a night in the police station until he casually mentioned that he had once been an archduke of Austria. After that he was permitted to go home and remit the amount owing at his leisure.

I have heard that at the outbreak of the war he offered his services to Francis Joseph, who

roughly declined to give him a commission in his army. Leopold fared no better with the Huns but now that all the Hapsburgs have been reduced to the ranks Leopold cannot regret that his nationality will protect his wife and himself during the period when an outraged democracy is clamouring for reprisals on those who misused their power in the past.

CHAPTER XIX

THE CASE OF SOPHY CHOTEK

It was shortly before the South African War that a well-known French journalist happened to be staying for a few days with Professor Chambery, of Prague University, at his country house just outside the Hungarian town of Presburg. The two men had come on from Vienna to escape from the Austrian capital at a time when nature, being at its loveliest, only man seemed vile.

On the morning after their arrival they twice passed a carriage occupied solely by a remarkable looking person, whose frock-coat suit could not disguise the fact that he was more accustomed to wearing uniform. The Frenchman was particularly struck by the pallor of his face, accentuated as it was by a heavy black moustache. His eyes gleamed unnaturally, but it was the unhealthy whiteness of his cheeks that held his attention.

"Who is that?" he asked his friend when the carriage had swept past them for the second time.

"Oh, that's the Archduke Francis Ferdinand," was the indifferent reply, for Chambery hated everything and everybody Austrian. "He is

paying a visit to the Archduke Frederick and the Archduchess Isabella. In a few moments you'll be able to catch a glimpse of their place."

The journalist did not speak again for a few moments, for this was the first time he had seen the heir to the Dual Crowns of Austria and Hungary. To him it seemed that the tragedy of the Hapsburgs was written on the white face of the prince.

"What's the matter with him?" he asked, after a pause.

"He is consumptive," said his companion, and then added with a laugh—"But he hasn't come to Presburg to be cured of consumption. The archduchess, the proudest and most ambitious woman in Europe, has six daughters. They are all pretty—I have seen them myself—but the Archduchess Gabrielle is the most beautiful of them all. She is the special attraction."

"Then she is likely to be the future Empress?" said the journalist.

"Yes, if Francis Ferdinand outlives his uncle, the Emperor," answered Professor Chambery, "but consumptives don't live long. Still, there are always plenty of archdukes, so that the Austrian Crown will never want for a person to wear it."

The subject dropped, but the Frenchman could not forget the pallor of the archduke's face. Death seemed written on it, and yet at that time he had still more than sixteen years to live, and then it was an assassin who was responsible for his death.

The Archduchess Gabrielle later in the day came into town with a friend, and the journalist saw for himself how lovely she was. It was impossible to imagine Francis Ferdinand looking at anyone else, but with the Hapsburgs the unexpected generally happens, and the heir to the throne was a typical member of his family in this respect. The Frenchman naturally took an interest in the affair, and later on both at Presburg and Vienna he heard a great deal about the archduke's marriage, and how love came to him in the most romantic way.

Francis Ferdinand had arrived in Presburg with the intention of proposing to the Archduchess Gabrielle. He had danced with her at those dull functions which the Austrian royal family tried to make exclusive and tried to enjoy, and, as she was quite attractive and pleasing, Francis Ferdinand, who knew that he was inclined to be consumptive, really did not care whom he married. But in common with a majority of persons who suffer from ill-health he had a weakness for talking about his ailment. Now a young girl like Gabrielle could not be expected to sit in a gloomy parlour and listen for an hour at a time to a young man's description of his sufferings and of his grievances with his doctors. Gabrielle was bright and frolicsome, and she did not at all relish being tied to a man whose manner suggested that he had just been sentenced to death. However, her strong-minded mother would not tolerate what she called her daughter's "nonsense." "He's the finest match in Europe," said the Archduchess Isabella,

"and you ought to be proud to attract his attention." So there was no help for it, and Gabrielle had to "look pleasant."

One afternoon in particular when Francis Ferdinand called and Gabrielle was sent to entertain him in the dreary old apartment known as the Grand Salon, she could scarcely listen patiently to his catalogue of grievances, and she was on the point of relieving her over-taxed nerves by running from the room when the door opened, and a tall, pretty girl—she was a girl in years, but she looked much older on account of a certain tightness about the lips—entered, evidently unaware that the room was occupied, for the moment she discovered the presence of the august visitor and the arch-duchess she stammered out an apology, and began to beat a retreat. But this was Gabrielle's opportunity and she seized it. Here was a chance to escape from the royal bore, and she determined to take advantage of it. With a cry of joy she ran to the door to intercept the new-comer.

"Sophy," she said, catching her by the arm, "you're just the very person I wish to see. Let me present you to the Archduke Francis Ferdinand. Cousin, this is the Countess Sophy Chotek. She's a dear, and she knows everything. You must tell her all about your complaint, and let Sophy give you good advice. There now, I'm sure you'll like one another."

Archduke and countess had scarcely finished bowing to each other when the door closed behind Gabrielle. She had escaped, and was

already on her way to rejoin her sisters, whose society she preferred to that of the second greatest man in the empire.

Such was the first meeting between the ill-fated couple. Sophy Chotek was the daughter of a nobleman of small means, and she had been glad to accept the position of lady-in-waiting to the Archduchess Isabella, and as she was clever and tactful she was now an indispensable member of the household. The archduchess had six daughters, and they all loved Sophy, who was devoted to them. If any problem had to be solved she was asked to solve it. All difficult questions were referred to her, and the Archduchess Gabrielle, in foisting her on to the Archduke Francis Ferdinand, was only pursuing the general policy of that household.

When the archduke gave the lady-in-waiting permission to be seated and began a stilted conversation with her he was wondering how he could get rid of her. Had she been of his own rank he would have excused himself there and then, but he did not like to humiliate an inferior, especially as she had not forced her presence on him. Presently, however, Sophy Chotek began to talk. She did not say much, but every word she uttered was in its right place. She gradually drew the melancholy prince on to speak of his illness, and before he knew it he was opening his heart to her as he had never done before to anyone else. Sophy was a mistress of the difficult art of tact.

"How I feel for you," she said in her gentle, musical voice, "but you must not live for your-

self alone, Imperial Highness. You are necessary to the Empire—you are——”

“I take no interest in the empire, countess,” he said abruptly, “but I thank you for your sympathy. I think I have found someone at last who understands me. I am very, very grateful.”

The woman's eyes shone.

“Your gratitude is my greatest reward,” she said in a whisper. Then she raised her eyes again to the level of his. “You must not be too hard on the Archduchess Gabrielle, Imperial Highness. She is only a girl.”

“Yes, she is only a girl,” he said, as if speaking to himself. “I wonder if I ought to drag her into my dull life?”

Sophy, realising that she had better not discuss the young archduchess, returned to the subject of his medical treatment.

“You will obey the doctor's orders?” she said, and it seemed that all her soul was in her eyes.

“I will,” he answered with a bow, and they parted.

A few days afterwards the Archduchess Isabella came to the private room of her lady-in-waiting, and with real emotion she thanked Sophy for having induced the archduke to take his medicine, adding that her daughter Gabrielle mingled her gratitude with hers. It was a touching scene, but if only they could have foreseen the future!

“His Imperial Highness takes a great interest in you, Sophy,” she went on, “for he asked if

you would be at the ball we are giving to-night. Of course, I told him you would, and now I want you to do me another favour."

"I am always at your service, madam," said Sophy in her quiet way.

"Then will you be particularly attentive to the archduke?" said Isabella pleadingly.

"Cheer him up. Speak to him of Gabrielle and what a charming wife she will make. A daughter of mine, Empress of Austria. Ah, that would be something to live for!"

They talked together for a long time, and Sophy promised to do all that she could, and she kept her promise. Francis Ferdinand sat many dances out with her, and when the ball was over was able to say in perfect sincerity that he had never enjoyed himself so much before. Hitherto he had only come to Presburg under pressure from his uncle, the emperor. From henceforth he would willingly make the journey of his own accord.

And so the courtship proceeded. The Archduchess Gabrielle was regarded as practically engaged to Francis Ferdinand, and already she was receiving some of the honours exclusive to the bride of a man who is expected to rule a great empire. Everybody with the exception of three persons declared that they were engaged—the exceptions were Francis Ferdinand, the Archduchess Gabrielle, and the Countess Sophy Chotek.

A match-making mother is usually credited with foresight, not to mention considerable cunning, and it is extraordinary that the Arch-

duchess Isabella, as crafty a woman as can be imagined, never suspected that when she practically ordered her lady-in-waiting to act as companion to the Austrian heir whenever he paid her a visit she should be going the quickest way to the destruction of her own ambitions. Francis Ferdinand simply revelled in Sophy's society, which he found intensely interesting. Her conversation and her repartee; above all, her brightness and her common sense, hypnotised him. He had been brought up in the gloomiest way by gloomy parents, and he was accustomed to meeting and mingling with automaton and not human beings. The very humaneness of Sophy Chotek captivated his heart and brain, and long before he made his proposal he resolved that she should be his wife.

The proposal actually took place in the garden at Presburg. They were standing beside one of the exquisite flower-beds when she ventured to congratulate him on his good spirits.

"You look happier and I may say healthier than I've ever known you to be," she said, in a low voice.

"I am very happy," he declared, his face lighting up, "for yesterday the specialists examined me and reported that the consumption has practically gone. I am actually putting on weight, countess." Then he jerked out the memorable words—"Sophy, you saved my life. It is yours. Will you marry me?"

She had been expecting something of this sort, and yet when he asked her the momentous question she reeled as she thought of the tre-

mendous possibilities involved. He had to catch her by the arm to keep her on her feet, and with a lover's care and solicitude he would not let her answer him until she had quite recovered.

"I—I am afraid, Francis," she whispered, with a glance over her shoulder at the towering turrets of the castle. "There's the archduchess—she will be furious—and the emperor. I am only a woman. I should be weak against so many."

"Promise to marry me," said the archduke, in a whisper, "and I will go to the emperor myself and obtain his consent. No one shall hear of our engagement until His Majesty has sanctioned it. Once he is on our side no one will dare say a word against us. But whatever his decision I will marry no one but you."

She had known long since that he loved her, and now she told him that he was her ideal, and that she asked only to be allowed to look after him as long as they both lived.

"I will go to Vienna to-morrow, Sophy," he said, before they parted. "Meanwhile we will keep our secret to ourselves."

There was a big dinner party in the castle that night, a farewell banquet to the august heir to the throne. The Archduke Francis Ferdinand was the guest of honour, and there were nearly a score of members of the reigning house to keep him company. Away down at the end of the table the Countess Sophy Chotek sat amongst the more humble members of the party, and many wives and daughters of local magnates

took precedence of her. It was not unamusing to her, for she knew that very soon she would rise far above them all, for Sophy Chotek was ambitious, and she meant to be Francis Ferdinand's empress as well as his wife.

The lovers had a brief reunion that night when the archduke said good-bye to her in the presence of the family. He was leaving in the morning and Sophy gave him a message of love with her eyes—her tongue silenced because they were not alone—for was he not undertaking the journey on her behalf? He loved her dearly, and he knew that she must be his wife—or nothing. Sophy Chotek, the poor lady-in-waiting, had reason to be proud of her conquest.

Francis Ferdinand was up early next morning, and he was in such a hurry to get to Vienna and settle the problems which were agitating him that he insisted upon taking an earlier train. The sudden alteration in his plans caused general confusion, and his valets had little or no time in which to pack, but the impatient lover, anxious to determine his fate, gave orders that there should be no delay, and, consequently, the packing was anything but thorough.

When he had gone the family prepared to settle down to its usual placid if not dull existence, and Sophy Chotek once more resumed her position of dependent. The young archduchesses relied upon her, and she was constantly at everybody's beck and call, so she had very little leisure.

Meanwhile in another apartment the ambitious mother was assuring her husband that on his

next visit the Archduke Francis Ferdinand would formally propose for their daughter Gabrielle's hand. Isabella was in an excellent humour, and she did not resent the intrusion of a footman who came to inform her that His Imperial Highness had left behind him several valuable articles in gold and silver. This was, of course, the sequel to his hasty departure.

"They must be packed and dispatched at once," said Isabella, rising. "Perhaps I had better superintend the packing myself."

She went to the bedroom lately occupied by her distinguished visitor, and began to examine the costly articles he had forgotten. Suddenly she picked up a medallion framed in gold, and instantly her face hardened and her eyes glinted as she found herself looking at the features of her lady-in-waiting.

"Send the Countess Sophy Chotek here at once," she commanded, and a few minutes later Sophy entered, but even before the Archduchess Isabella spoke she must have guessed from a single glance from her that her secret had been discovered.

"What does this mean?" thundered the haughty woman, holding the medallion towards her lady-in-waiting.

"It is the property of His Imperial Highness, madam," she said with a curtsy.

"Who gave it to him?" said the jealous woman.

"I did at his special request, madam," said Sophy.

For a minute—a long minute, too—the women

faced one another. There was no need for explanations or excuses. The Archduchess Isabella had had her eyes opened unexpectedly. She now remembered the numerous occasions when she had seen Francis Ferdinand and her lady-in-waiting chatting confidentially in odd corners. She remembered that it was Sophy Chotek who had acted as guide to the archduke when he had expressed a wish to see the castle from turret to cellar. And what a long time they had taken! It was no relief to the overwrought woman to admit to herself that all this had been sanctioned—nay, ordered by herself. In a flash she saw that her own hopes were perilously near a catastrophe.

At last she found her voice.

"Countess," she said, with icy politeness, "you have exactly half an hour in which to leave the castle."

"But I can't pack in that time, madam," said the lady-in-waiting. "I must have at least until this afternoon."

"If within half an hour you are not out of the castle I will have you expelled from it," said the archduchess mercilessly. "Your property will be sent after you. From this moment we are utter strangers."

Sophy Chotek left Presburg immediately in a state of uncertainty. All depended now on the interview between the old emperor and his nephew. If Francis Ferdinand obtained permission to marry her all would be well. If not—

She sent him a telegram, and in response he

arranged for her to stay with friends near Vienna. Days of doubt and misery followed, for the emperor would not listen to his nephew's proposals. Day by day Sophy became paler and more spiritless, and Francis Ferdinand, driven to desperation, took his courage in both hands, entered his uncle's presence, and told him with exceptional bluntness that he would marry Sophy Chotek whether he approved or not and that he was prepared to renounce all his rights and retire to Italy with the girl he loved.

When he had convinced his uncle of his determination the Emperor Francis Joseph had to give in, though he obtained one important concession from his heir. The marriage was to be a morganatic one, and any children born to Sophy Chotek were not to be considered of royal birth. In other words, no son of the union could succeed to the throne.

The archduke, having signed away the rights of unborn children, the marriage took place. Of course, the Archduchess Isabella was furious, and momentarily elated by the Imperial decision that Francis Ferdinand's children could not inherit the throne, she set to work to try and marry one of her daughters to the archduke's nephew, who was the next heir to the throne. This person is now, of course, the fugitive ex-Emperor Carl. Isabella, however, had another failure, for the Archduke Charles Francis Joseph eventually married the Princess Zita of Parma.

But to return to Sophy and her husband. The marriage was completely successful, and although the young wife was not recognised as a member

of the Imperial House, she was not less tactful as Duchess of Hohenberg—the title granted her by the emperor—than she had been as the Countess Sophy Chotek. She was biding her time. It was only seldom that she discussed the future with Francis Ferdinand, who was devoted to her. This was after the birth of her second son, when the sight of her two healthy boys and the knowledge that they were above the average in intelligence and good looks naturally caused her to wish that the elder might be the recognised heir to the throne. She knew that he would make a better emperor than any of the degenerate imbeciles produced by the Hapsburg system of inter-marriages.

“Do not worry,” said Francis Ferdinand, in that steady, determined voice of his that his enemies had learnt to fear, “when I am emperor I shall be all-powerful. Charles,” he was referring of course to his nephew, the second heir, “can live on in his fool’s paradise. When I am emperor you shall be empress and our son, Sophy, shall be the Crown Prince.”

He meant it, too, because he was so much in love with the woman he had married that he regarded her wishes as commands. For her part she gave him no trouble, receiving the snubs of the archduchesses without complaint and ignoring the half-concealed insolence of the court officials. She did not wish to worry Francis Ferdinand, or involve him in any quarrels, but she was waiting for the day when her turn would come and she would be able to repay friend and foe,

Amongst reigning monarchs she found one real friend, and that was the late King Edward VII. It was true that Wilhelm II had privately promised Francis Ferdinand to receive his wife as an equal if they paid him a visit, but he broke his promise and when the Archduke and the Duchess of Hohenberg visited Berlin and attended a State banquet, Sophy Chotek was placed at table below the minor members of the German Royal Family. The archduke did not mind this very much, but when he was asked to a function and his wife was not, although ladies were to be present, he promptly brought his visit to an end and returned home. This happened some time after the archduke's marriage, and when the next heir married and had a son, and the succession was settled, Wilhelm's hostility towards Francis Ferdinand became more pronounced. He had been jealous of the latter's liking for King Edward, and Francis Ferdinand's admiration of the British nation greatly displeased the arch-Hun. I have no doubt in my mind that for these and other reasons Wilhelm II of Germany had a great deal to do with the events which led up to the terrible tragedy at Sarajevo in June, 1914.

The kaiser, certain that Germany's forty years of preparation for war had made it impregnable, wished for an opportunity to plunge Europe into bloodshed, confident that an easy victory would be his, and that world dominion would follow. He looked around him, therefore, to see how he could cause the nations to spring at one another's throats, and, knowing that the

Austro-Hungarian Empire is always a seething mass of conflicting nationalities, and interests, he determined to start the conflagration there.

German agents were sent to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the local discontents were egged on to make a show of resistance against Austria. The kaiser knew that if anything serious happened in Bosnia, the Austrian Emperor would blame Serbia, because the province had once been part of the Serbian kingdom.

While he was still in doubts as to what course he should pursue it was announced that Francis Ferdinand and his wife were to pay a visit to the disaffected provinces. Wilhelm, jealous of anyone happier than himself, resented the success of Francis Ferdinand's marriage. He knew that the archduke and his wife were daily growing in popularity. He was aware that the day the old emperor died the Duchess of Hohenburg would become an empress, and he hated her and her husband. They disliked him, and he had realised that Austria would become anti-Prussian if they reigned.

The tragedy of Sarajevo is too recent to need recapitulation. We all know how it was utilised by the kaiser to start the war. Austria blamed Serbia for the crime, and urged on by Germany refused to listen to reason. How bitterly she must be repenting now!

And so Sophy Chotek, to use her best-known name, died by the side of the husband she loved, and with only one regret—that she was leaving her children to the tender mercies of her enemies. The romance ended in tragedy, swift,

sudden, and unexpected, but if the lovers lost their lives, Austria lost much more, for they would have ruled her wisely when their turn came and perhaps saved the Hapsburgs from extinction.

CHAPTER XX

A ROMANCE AND A TRAGEDY

OLD Duke Ludwig of Bavaria came of an unhappy family. Of his five sisters, one, the Empress Elizabeth of Austria, was assassinated; another was accidentally burnt to death; a third was dethroned, and the remaining two led tempestuous and distracted lives. For many years Ludwig was spared the bad luck of his relations, but after a first successful marriage outside royalty he contracted a second one, which ended disastrously.

The Bavarian Royal Family has always been noted for insanity and extravagance, and Ludwig passed his early years in riotous self-indulgence, ignoring the warnings of his doctors, and even treating with contempt a polite expression of sorrow at his behaviour from Queen Victoria. The young duke argued that he could do no wrong provided he did not imitate his relations, and he therefore struck out into a course of his own, which after all proved more successful than the policies of those who criticised him. He was a young man, tall and graceful, with a democratic manner that was in startling contrast to the semi-divine attitude assumed by the lunatic members of the Bavarian Royal House. Ludwig

would go anywhere and with anybody if sport was to be obtained, and he was very popular with his fellow-officers, who were rather sorry that he was not king of Bavaria. Still, there was more than a chance that he would succeed to the throne, and the Bavarian statesmen always had him in view when they went match-making on behalf of their country. They hoped that Ludwig would marry into some powerful foreign family which would help Bavaria to withstand Prussian tyranny. In those years every true Bavarian loathed the Prussian. From the highest to the lowest all strove to keep their hated neighbours at bay, and every attempt on the part of Prussia to gain a footing in Bavaria was repelled with fanatical fervour.

That the hatred continued until quite recently is shown by the well-authenticated story of an incident which happened at a Bavarian review a year before the Great War. The king and the veteran Duke Ludwig were present. His Majesty, who had been troubled by the criticisms of the Socialist party in the Bavarian Diet, asked a certain regiment, of which he was colonel, two questions. The first was, "Who are the foes without?" and to this the soldiers answered, "All enemies of the Fatherland, Majesty." That was satisfactory, and the king, recalling the obnoxious activities of the Socialists, thought he would let them know his real opinion of them. He therefore asked, "And who are the foes within?" Instead, however, of the expected answer, "The Socialists," the whole

regiment with one voice bellowed, "Those swines of Prussians, Majesty!" It was said that old Duke Ludwig nearly collapsed, so great was his laughter, while the king went home in a fury.

It was easy for Ludwig in his younger days to gain popularity by letting it be known that he would not wed a Prussian Princess. As he was near the throne this announcement was received with acclamation, and the unconventional prince proceeded to find a wife without bothering about the political necessities of his country.

He had no difficulty, for from his first meeting with Henrietta Mendel he decided that she must be his bride. Henrietta was very beautiful with an innocent, angelic cast of countenance, dreamy eyes, and lovely complexion. Ludwig first saw her on the boards of a Vienna theatre when he was swaggering in a box with half a dozen boon companions, most of whom were not sober. Ludwig himself had dined and wine well, but the face of the obscure actress brought him to his senses, and he ceased to interrupt the performance, and as he had sufficient authority to make his friends behave themselves the performers were grateful. Then he waited impatiently for the play to end, and immediately it was over he went round to the stage-door to beg an introduction to the beauty who had captivated him.

The manager was only too delighted. Royal dukes were rather too plentiful in Austria, but the enterprising theatrical speculator rubbed his

hands with glee as he realised what a boom there would be for his company when it became known that a member of it had attracted the friendship of Duke Ludwig of Bavaria. He, therefore, encouraged Henrietta to be very kind to His Royal Highness, never imagining that Ludwig was serious in his attentions and meant to make the girl his legal wife.

Henrietta knew that she was a beauty, but she had sufficient common-sense to admit that she had no pretensions to be considered anything better than a third-rate actress. She could not hope for fame, and her ambition was to marry comfortably and retire into private life. Her father had kept a small shop, and Henrietta had picked up what education she had from books and newspapers and the green-room—not very efficient academies, yet she was intelligent enough to make the most of them.

Ludwig, young, handsome, rich, and impulsive, forgot the world when Henrietta Mendel came into his life. She was so beautiful and fairylike that he could not bear to be parted from her, and when his courtship was in its earliest stages he declared that she must marry him. He did not ask for a hole-and-corner affair. They would be married with the fullest publicity, he said, for he was proud of her, and knew that she would make him happy.

Of course, there was great opposition. Francis Joseph of Austria protested as the husband of Ludwig's sister. He implored the duke not to give the Empress of Austria a shopkeeper's daughter for a sister-in-law. Ludwig, who had

courage, retorted by advising Joseph to try and make his own wife happy before interfering. He was aware that his sister Elizabeth, although only twenty-one, was a heart-broken and disillusioned woman, and he strongly resented the emperor's advice, as well as the censure that it implied.

When Henrietta became his wife it was fortunate for the lovers that Bismarck, the ambitious Prussian, was bent upon swallowing up all the smaller States in the German Confederacy, for he secretly encouraged the union, hoping that it would make the Bavarians mistrust and quarrel with their reigning house. Of course, before the marriage took place Ludwig had to renounce formally all claims to the throne for himself and for any children he might have. But he did not mind this renunciation; he was only too glad to escape from that heritage of lunatics, and he wanted to live the life of a gentleman of means and leisure, especially as he knew that his career as an army officer was not to be terminated because his wife came of the people.

The marriage was very successful. Henrietta, although very young and hitherto something of a spoilt pet, knew how to manage Ludwig. She held him by her personality. The world of women had no fascination for him now. Ludwig loved his home and the only child of the union, the famous Countess Marie Larisch. He had to be tactfully managed, of course, and sometimes Henrietta found him very trying to live with; but her good sense triumphed over all diffi-

culties, and Duke Ludwig had the rare satisfaction for a Wittelsbach of realising that his marriage was not a failure. His sister, the Austrian empress, had cursed the day she was united to her husband; two other sisters were complaining about their husbands; cousins by the dozen were making food for scandalmongers by reason of their inability to live amicably with their consorts. All had, of course, married for reasons of State. No wonder Ludwig was in the habit of gleefully extolling the virtues of morganatic marriages. On one occasion he horrified the Bavarian Council of Ministers by advising them to find a healthy girl of good principles and make her the wife of King Ludwig. "She may save him from a lunatic's grave," he said. "Nothing else can." His advice was rejected, and soon afterwards the king drowned himself.

When Wilhelm the Second (and last) ascended the throne of Germany Ludwig and Henrietta had been married many years, and, inspired by curiosity, the young monarch visited them. He was received by the Baroness von Wallersee, as Henrietta was now called, but Wilhelm had the bad taste to patronise the devoted wife of the Bavarian duke. Ludwig would have none of it, however.

"I know Prussia wants to make trouble with Bavaria in order to have a pretext for declaring war on us," he said angrily to the kaiser, "but remember that I am addressing you as my guest. I have nothing to do with the government of my beloved country. I renounced all my rights long ago. Let me tell you, therefore, that when

you enter a gentleman's house you must behave yourself. An insult to my dear wife is an insult to me."

A Bavarian comic paper at the time gave this story with suitable illustrations, thinly disguising the names, of course! but everybody recognised them, and crowds assembled outside the duke's house and cheered him.

Had Ludwig taken any part in politics then there is no doubt that the kaiser would have used all his influence to humiliate him, but he could not vent his wrath on the royal duke who lived in retirement except for the few months in the year when he trained with his regiment.

Meanwhile the happy years passed. Henrietta never lost her beauty, and Ludwig, refined by her influence, was a model husband. Old age came to him slowly, and filled him with no regrets. Both of them found their youth again in their only daughter until she came into the life of the Empress Elizabeth and through her was involved in the Meyerling tragedy and the numerous scandals created by the Crown Prince Rudolph's unhappy end. Then husband and wife consoled one another, and Ludwig prayed that when the time came for Henrietta to die he might die, too. He was destined, however, to survive her many years, and to lose all that he had gained by his marriage to her.

It was Henrietta who successfully steered her husband through the troublous times that followed the suicide of King Ludwig. She wisely kept him from taking part in the court intrigues

that ensued, and she would not let him join in the plot that enabled the present ex-king to annex the Crown while mad King Otto was in an asylum. The kaiser sent Prussian spies to stir up strife in Bavaria, and an attempt was made to sow dissension between Ludwig and the king and Crown Prince. The duke would have fallen into the trap but for his wife, and he had good cause to appreciate her guidance when the Prussian plot was fully revealed in a scene between the Crown Prince of Germany and the Crown Prince of Bavaria. There was some candid talking then, and Prince Rupert, animated by the insanity of his ancestors, was with difficulty restrained from personally chastising the kaiser's heir. Only those in the inner circle of Diplomacy knew at the time how near Prussia and Bavaria were to going to war.

The death of Henrietta Mendel, Baroness von Wallersee, was a terrible blow to Ludwig. He could scarcely be brought to realise that he was a widower. The day after the funeral his servants found him wandering helplessly about the house as if looking for the wife on whom he had leaned for so many years. Then he became ill, and his life was despaired of, and when he recovered his friends decided that his thoughts must be distracted and that he must be made to take a keener interest in life. Politics were tried, but failed. He was too old for the intrigues of public life. His age also debarred him from taking part in army matters. There seemed nothing for him to do but to await the end. Most people had forgotten him. His great con-

temporary and brother-in-law, the Emperor Francis Joseph, would have nothing to do with him, and Ludwig, even if he had married a girl of the people, would not condescend to meet Katti Schratt, commonly reported to be Francis Joseph's morganatic wife, who was, as he must have shrewdly suspected, a spy in the pay of the German Secret Service.

Then Ludwig completely astonished his friends by informing them that he was going to marry morganatically for the second time. They protested, advised, implored—all in vain. Henrietta Mendel had made him happy, so why shouldn't Madame von Bartoll? Madame was no beauty, but she was interesting and clever. She knew how to flatter, too, and her devotion to the duke was touching. From amongst all the ladies who had the honour of his acquaintance he selected her, and she was only too delighted to respond, for the marriage would give her a "pull" in Bavarian society and bring with it riches.

Madame von Bartoll was a Prussian by birth, who occasionally—this was, of course, before the war—claimed to have French blood in her veins. Although verging on middle age she liked to be skittish at times, and she was very hungry for money and social power. The world had progressed a lot since the day the duke had married Henrietta Mendel. Public opinion would no longer tolerate too much being made of the supposed difference between royal blood and that of those outside the "sacred pale." The ambitious woman expected to be made a

duchess and to be received by the Royal House of Bavaria. That she had some reason to anticipate this is evident when I mention that she was in the pay of Prussia, and had for years maintained an expensive establishment by means of "presents" from Steinhauser, the Chief of the German Secret Service. It is certain that, but for the hearty if unobtrusive support of the kaiser, Duke Ludwig would never have married Madame von Bartoll. Twice he wavered and wrote cancelling the engagement, but on each occasion he changed his mind at the last moment. Meanwhile, powerful and unscrupulous agents of Prussia worked on Madame's behalf, and quietly and effectively the opposition to the second morganatic marriage of the duke was removed. Even the then Regent was induced to regard the match with favour, though why he should have done so has never been ascertained. He could not have foreseen the sequel to Ludwig's second matrimonial adventure.

The opposition of Francis Joseph was easily disposed of. All that monarch's relatives were well aware that he had married Katti Schratt, and that his morganatic wife practically directed Austrian affairs. Even the kaiser, master hypocrite as he is, dared not take the old emperor seriously, and nobody listened to his tearful protests, least of all Ludwig, his brother-in-law.

There is no doubt that Ludwig married morganatically a second time because he believed such a marriage to be guarantee of happiness. Madame von Bartoll appeared to be devoted to

him and anything but mercenary. It was with difficulty that she could be brought to discuss marriage settlements. Her only object in marrying him, she said with a blush, was that she might attend to his wants and be his devoted nurse during his remaining years.

It is a well-known fact that a man and a woman may marry with the best intentions in the world and with considerable mutual affection and yet from the moment they are husband and wife loathe one another. This was the case with Duke Ludwig and Madame von Bartoll, particularly so with the duke. The service had no sooner ended than he was seized with a violent revulsion of feeling. Madame von Bartoll, now his wife, became hateful to him. He could not refrain from comparing her with Henrietta Mendel, whose memory became dearer and tenderer to him because he bitterly regretted having married again. It was only by an accident that he did not assault Madame von Bartoll in front of the priests who had performed the ceremony, for he was about to do so when a friend, mistaking his passion for the symptoms of a fit of epilepsy—the family disease—seized him by the arm and led him away.

That evening Ludwig was discovered sobbing bitterly, but he would not answer the anxious inquiries of his doctor. He knew that it was impossible to explain that he had realised his mistake and that the woman who had become his wife a few hours earlier was to him the most detestable on the face of the earth.

Unfortunately Madame von Bartoll could not understand his sudden aversion to her. She was clever in many respects, but she was unable to fathom his state of mind. When she approached him with a fixed smile and a coy expression and endeavoured to put her arms around him the old man turned and struck her, and then in a paroxysm of rage tried to strangle her. She fled to her room shrieking and locked herself in all night. In the morning she tried to believe that it had been only a horrid dream, but the first glimpse of her husband's glowering countenance told the truth.

Had Ludwig lived in a country where the people were not political slaves his violence would have resulted in his confinement in a lunatic asylum. Everybody knew how he persecuted his morganatic wife. Many a time the silence of the night was broken by her screams, and had it not been for the servants the wretched woman would have been murdered.

At last unable to endure, and by now indifferent as to whether the kaiser carried out his secret threats or not, she filed a petition for divorce against Ludwig. Great efforts were made to hush the matter up, and she was offered a large sum of money to withdraw the petition, but suffering had inspired her with vengeful feelings and she persevered. The Bavarian Court, acting on the instructions of the Royal Family, granted her request with as little publicity as possible, though enough was revealed to prove that the old duke was as cruel and abandoned a ruffian as was to be found in the whole Empire.

of Germany." His first marriage had snatched him from a wicked life ; his second demoralised him. That is the simple truth, and its very simplicity makes it a most perplexing human problem.

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